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# A Cultural History of *The Great Book of Ireland – Leabhar Mór na hÉireann*

Thesis presented by

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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2020

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## Abstract

This thesis critically examines *The Great Book of Ireland /Leabhar Mór na hÉireann* (*GBOI*), a late-twentieth-century single-volume vellum manuscript created in Dublin between 1989 and 1993. Addressing a gap in both public and critical awareness of this modern manuscript, the thesis situates the *GBOI* into the wider historical, literary and cultural contexts of the period by drawing on book history as well as Irish cultural, literary and art criticism. The thesis performs a close reading of nineteen folios of the *GBOI* using a thematic model, which examines the publishing and material history of the Irish poetry book, word-image relations, gender discourses, and national and transnational politics. The study reveals the ways in which late-twentieth-century internationalism and ideas of globalisation and inclusivity shaped the *GBOI's* ideological framework. It shows how the *GBOI* seeks to reject traditional homogenous representations of Irishness and Irish nationhood by anthologising the multiplicity of Irish identities at the end of the twentieth-century. In its conclusion, the thesis argues for the need for a wider knowledge of the project and its components and signals for the potential of digital dissemination.

## Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.

Signed



Date: 19- December 2019

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## List of abbreviations used

- *GBOI - The Great Book of Ireland.*
- *FDA – The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing.*

**The pages of this book breath and extend and open up with the slowness of the seasons (Eva Bourke)**

(Folio 107) *(The Great Book of Ireland)*

## A Note on *The Great Book of Ireland – Leabhar Mór na hÉireann*

> I think that this book encapsulates a moment of time. It is a kaleidoscopic collection of words and colours that makes a pattern of what it meant to be Irish in that time, in a contemporary world that was falling from a version of modernism into a period of consumption and a postmodern flux. But at the same time those that were writing, and contributing, those that were making images, those were composing music were celebrating a unity between what was the integrity of memory and the sovereignty of the imagination into the future. I think the book will be a work of beauty and wonder, and poignancy beyond nostalgia. I think what a fitting way, to have this book in this university, and I hope available to the public too, can think of no better way to marking the final days of the twentieth century. (Higgins)
>
> (President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins speaking at University College Cork on the occasion of the acquisition of the *GBOI* January 2013)

*The Great Book of Ireland – Leabhar Mór na hÉireann* is a single-volume illuminated vellum manuscript comprising the original work of 120 artists, 143 poets, nine composers and one calligrapher. The book was created by two organisations: Poetry Ireland and Clashganna Mills Trust in Dublin between 1989 and 1993, as a social enterprise venture in order to raise funds for their organisations. The project had two points of origin; the first occurred in the 1970s in the British Library in London when Theo Dorgan, a student at University College Cork, viewed a manuscript exhibition featuring poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Andrew Marvell (Dorgan 2013). Seeing the handwritten manuscripts of these canonical poets and the "eerie sense of their presence" had a profound effect on Dorgan (Dorgan 2014). The second beginning was in 1989 when the artist Gene Lambert approached Poetry Ireland to assist in the sale of *In the Land of Punt,* a fundraising publication for Clashganna Mills Trust containing the poetry of Paul Durcan and reproductions of paintings by Lambert (Dorgan 2014). Inspired by the

enthusiasm of Lambert, the Director of Poetry Ireland, Theo Dorgan, held further discussions with Clashganna Mills Trust. A plan was soon made to create a handcrafted vellum book of poems illustrated by a single artist. This idea soon evolved into a larger concept; the editors wanted the *GBOI* to form a dialogue between artists and poets (Dorgan 2014). They proposed that fifty artists would illustrate the book and fifty poets would contribute a poem. In the end, the *GBOI* would exceed these parameters. The Great Book of Ireland Trust was also established to ensure that the funds from the sale of the book would be equally divided between Poetry Ireland and Clashganna Mills Trust.

The production of the book was a complex venture involving artists, poets, musicians, philanthropists, politicians, and civil servants, as well as business and craftspeople. Due to the multiple economic downturns of the 1980s, public arts funding was scarce; making the financing of the project a challenge (Dorgan 2014). Much depended on goodwill, innovation and collaboration by a whole host of agents. The arts communities both North and South of the border, however, recognised the value in the project and, from the outset, agreed to work on the book free of charge. In all, hundreds of individuals would contribute to the making of the book.

Poet Theo Dorgan and artist Gene Lambert led the project by co-ordinating, co-editing and fundraising for the book. While Dorgan took charge of the literary content, Lambert solicited and edited the art selections. The project's business manager was the CEO of Clashganna Mills Trust, Eamon Martin. Anthony Cains, Director of Conservation at Trinity College Dublin, worked on the practical elements

of the bookbinding and supplied the Sardinian goatskin that forms the exterior of *GBOI.* Cains had bought the goatskin in Florence in the 1960s while working on a conservation project and had kept it for decades, waiting for the right project (Dorgan 2014). The artist Trevor Scott was recruited to act as a senior design consultant for the book to oversee the calligraphy and ensure the "flow of continuity throughout the book" (Dorgan 2014). A calligrapher, Denis Brown, was hired to unify the appearance of the book with illustration and calligraphy. On 11 June 1989, Seamus Heaney and John Montague completed the inaugural inscription at the offices of Poetry Ireland on the occasion of their respective fiftieth and sixtieth birthday readings at the Gate Theatre in Dublin. The Taoiseach at the time, Charles J. Haughey, attended along with the newly inaugurated Irish President Mary Robinson. Photographer Amelia Stein was commissioned to record the symbolic moment of the birth of the book by the two Northern-Irish poets. Heaney chose to inscribe his poem "Punishment" while Montague decided on "Mount Eagle". Both poets had some difficulty writing on the atypical vellum material, an issue that most contributors encountered (Lambert and Dorgan 4). Amelia Stein remembers the day of the inscription as charged with potential meaning:

> If my memory serves me correctly, Theo Dorgan the poet and Gene Lambert the visual artist, asked me to be present at the old premises of Poetry Ireland. Located in a basement in Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2, a dark room, book-lined shelves, overflowing with volumes of carefully written words, all held for posterity.[…]Seamus Heaney and John Montague were present to write directly onto the vellum manuscript

> pages that would then be embellished with illustrations by a selection of visual artists. I can remember being nervous at the task, nervous of meeting these great men, nervous of not making the required photos, after all this book was made to stand the test of time, with the intention to be a contemporary 'treasure' (Stein)

Photographs of a bemused Heaney and Montague appeared in the national newspapers the following day. Many more artists and writers followed in the footsteps of Heaney and Montague and inscribed the book. The *GBOI* was first exhibited in 1991, the year in which Dublin was the European City of Culture, at the newly opened Irish Museum of Modern Art; however, the book was not completed until 1993. Between 1991 and 1993, there were five further additions to the *GBOI*: Philip Casey, Allen Ginsberg, Frances Harvey, Paul Hewson (Bono), and Derek Rowen (Guggi). President Michael D. Higgins was the last person to inscribe the book; he signed his poem on Folio 93 on the occasion of UCC's acquisition of the book in January 2013. Overall, in four years, 273 artists from different fields had contributed to the *GBOI* project creating 137 unique folios. The *GBOI* had in total sixty women and 213 male contributors resulting in a sizeable tome with a mass of 9.13kg.[1]

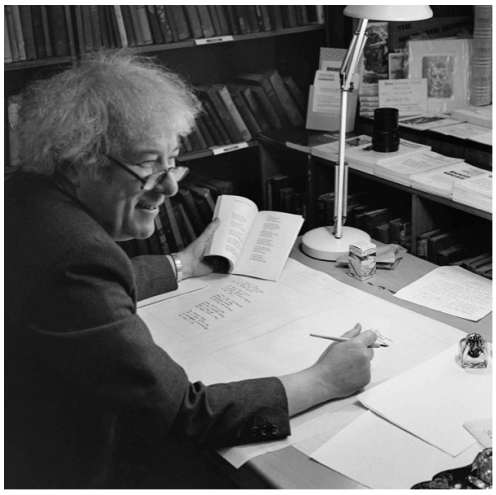


Figure 1 (Stein)

Figure 1 Amelia Stein photograph of Seamus Heaney inscribing his poem "Punishment" on to the pages of the *GBOI*



Figure 2 (Stein)

Figure 2 Amelia Stein photograph of John Montague inscribing his poem "Mount Eagle" on to the pages of the *GBOI*

**A Stately Book**

The *GBOI* has close links to a number of state organisations. Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey became the official patron of the book when he provided funding from his department to keep the project financed; his name appears on the title page. The book also got a specific mention in the *Finance Act of 1991*, when the Department of Finance agreed that the sale of the book would be tax-exempt (Tynan 3). Over seventy additional funders and supporters are listed at the back of the book. Some notable funders of the *GBOI* were Dublin European Capital of Culture Dublin 1991, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Royal Hibernian Academy and the National Library of Ireland. The state-sponsored woodland and forestry service Coillte played a role in providing wood from elm trees planted by W.B. Yeats at Thoor Ballylee in Co. Galway; the donated wood was processed into the *GBOI*'s boards that form the structure (the front and back covers of the book) and was also used for the holding box that houses the *GBOI.* RTÉ, the national broadcaster, commissioned a documentary on the making of the book entitled *Pages for the Great Book of Ireland.* As the project neared its completion, the editors hoped that a wealthy benefactor would acquire the book for the State; however, this did not happen. On completion, the book was displayed in the Irish Museum of Modern Art for a short period and then stored in a bank vault in Dublin for twenty years, while a buyer was found.

In 2013 University College Cork (UCC), another state-funded body acquired the *GBOI* through philanthropic fundraising for the sum of US$1 million

(€752,000). In January 2013, President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins was guest of honour at a ceremony to celebrate the acquisition of the *GBOI* in the Aula Maxima at UCC. In an interesting turn of fate, President Higgins had also contributed to the *GBOI* while he was a Labour TD for Galway West in 1990. Over fifty other contributors to the *GBOI* joined the president for the ceremony, including Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. The *GBOI* is currently housed in special collections in UCC's Boole Library and was most recently viewed by the United Kingdom's Prince Charles as part of his State visit to Ireland in June 2018.


's of "The Great Book of Ireland". Mr Gene Lambert of the Clashganna Mills Trust (left) and Mr Theo Dorgan of Poetr
Haughey, at the unveiling of the volume in the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin, last nig

Figure 3 *(Irish Times)*

Figure 3 Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey unveils the *GBOI* at Irish Museum Modern of Art in Dublin on June 25, 1991.




Figure 4 (BBC)

Figure 4 Prince Charles views the *GBOI* in UCC as part of his State visit to Ireland. Accompanied by UCC President Patrick G. O Shea and UCC staff on 14th June 2018.

## Introduction

> At the material level of inscription then, the book protests against those who fumble in a greasy till and instead gestures a more large-minded conception of nationality and an ideal of bookmaking that respects the integrity of materials rather than trying to reproduce linguistic codes as cheaply as possible.
>
> (Bornstein 61) (Bornstein on the Cuala Press in *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*)

> It was a marvellous thing to behold – and to hold – the paper so heavy, the printing so obviously letterpress, the sense of respect and achievement endorsed in the actual fabric of the volume. It marked a moment. It was the right treatment for the generation who came into their own in its pages. […] it changed the game, it secured the ground, and the fact that it was published in Ireland by the Dolmen Press was, of course, important. The work it carried told readers and young writers that cultural and artistic maturity had arrived in the land for good. It also got around.
>
> (Heaney 50- 51) (Heaney on *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing* in *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney)*

Is there a connection between the act of bookmaking in Ireland and the act of building a nation? What role do the arts play in crafting a national, or indeed a post-national, identity? What are the dynamics between artistic practice and wider debates about nation formation? These questions are central preoccupations that Irish writers, artists and cultural commentators have engaged with for over a century, beginning with the Irish Literary Revival. The astounding cultural achievements of the Literary Revival were rooted in its ability to combine Ireland's political, social, cultural and material identity and present it to the world. Through this process, the Revivalists reimagined and shaped alternative futures for Ireland. As the leading figure of the Revival, Yeats embodied the intersection between the arts and politics in his role as both writer and politician. Yeats' radical mix of art-infused politics reverberates through Irish culture

in serious and satiric modes and continues to frame our discussions to this day. This first chapter of this thesis shows how the *GBOI* is influenced by a Yeatsian ideology and replicates the cultural nationalism of Cuala Press, which had a "more large-minded conception of nationality and an ideal of bookmaking that respects the integrity of materials" (Bornstein 61). On a material and ideological level, the *GBOI* reveals a strong Yeatsian influence.

## The Materiality of The Great Book of Ireland

The viewer of *GBOI* is immediately drawn to the materiality of the book and its case. Contained within a polished wooden box, the *GBOI* communicates values that exceed its contents. As Brian Cummings writes, the "material form given to a book has a great deal to do with the symbolic value that is ascribed to it" (Cummings 63). In the case of the *GBOI*, much of its meaning resides in its making; the wooden case and boards of the book are made from elm trees (symbolic of the Celtic Underworld) cut at W.B Yeats' estate at Thoor Ballylee in County Galway. The use of the wood explicitly links the *GBOI* to Yeats, the Revivalist movements and fine book production in Ireland. The book pays homage to Yeats and his legacy in both a tangible and symbolic manner. Secondly, the calfskin vellum material of the *GBOI* carries significant weight as a material that was historically used in the production of illuminated manuscripts in Ireland. Since the sixth century, other significant Irish books such as *The Book of Kells, The Book of Durrow* and *The Book of Invasions* had been made from this material. The materiality (vellum and wood) adds significant symbolic value and connects this book with a long-standing tradition of bookmaking. Book production in Ireland dates to the monastic settlements where Irish monks

merged “two different cultural streams, the classical tradition of late antiquity” and the northern, insular style of the “barbaric tribes” that invaded the Roman Empire during the fifth and sixth century, shaping the aesthetic of the Irish illuminated manuscripts (Harthan 15-16). This aesthetic spread to the island of Iona and beyond, influencing how books were created in the western world (Harthan 16). The form and material of the *GBOI* engage with the symbolism and imagery of the Revivalist period along with the ancient manuscript tradition in Ireland. The latter connection was problematic for a whole host of reasons.

In practical terms, many of the skills associated with the making of vellum books – and inscribing art on vellum – were lost over the centuries. Thus, the writers and artists of the *GBOI* had to learn quickly how to work on unfamiliar material with older instruments and inks. Only calligrapher Denis Brown and artist Denis Kelly had previously worked on vellum (Dorgan 2014: Ó Doibhlin 2013). Contributors had the added worry of working on vellum that contained the works of other poets and artists already inscribed, or in many cases had to work with vellum that already contained artworks on the underside (Dorgan 2014). The notes that were made by Lambert and Dorgan during the production of the book note that the “technical problems were daunting”, with artists given one chance to work on an “unfamiliar” living surface which “stretched and shrank as it was wet or dry” (Lambert and Dorgan 4). The material was “light years away from bleached, flat paper”: the surface containing minute amounts of natural oils and “subtly uneven” with “microscopic bumps and hollows” (Lambert and Dorgan 4). A whole calfskin was used in each folio, resulting in a book one-and-a-half times the size of the *Book of Kells* (Lambert and Dorgan 4).

The use of the illuminated manuscript form makes the *GBOI* difficult to place alongside other Irish vellum manuscripts, as these other books were made at a time when printing presses were either not readily available or not invented yet. At this time, books were mostly reserved for religious texts, while the *GBOI* was a secular piece of art that would serve as a fundraising project. Lambert writes that each of the contributors and editors feared pastiche and aimed to prevent the project from becoming "a degeneration into a kind of Celtic mist" (Lambert 149). At first glance, the contradictions of the *GBOI* can make it unplaceable, which has led to the book not forming part of wider discourses on Irish material culture.

## Placing the Great Book of Ireland

The *GBOI* is curiously absent from Irish cultural criticism. No mention of it is made in Fintan O'Toole's *A History of Ireland in 100 Objects,* where a natural home might have been found. In discussions of Irish poetry and Irish literature more generally, the *GBOI* is a largely invisible artefact. Perhaps the reason for this is that the *GBOI* is an exercise in medievalism, a modern book made by outmoded practices. This thesis shows that the origins of the *GBOI* are found within the context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century cultural practices and politics. Although the *GBOI* is an illuminated manuscript, it is important to establish that the *GBOI* is a modern, twentieth-century book inspired by modern practices of making art and books on the island of Ireland. The *GBOI* has been continually compared to the *Book of Kells* and called its equivalent, yet tracing from the Cuala Press and William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement lends a more tangible line of descent than from *The Book of Kells*. The *GBOI* was made in a capitalist system and was created to be a commodity, while

the *Book of Kells* was formed in a feudal system. The narrative that the *GBOI* is a modern *Book of Kells* ignores these facts and yet this narrative persists. In the introduction to *An Leabhar Mór: The Great Book of Gaelic*, a book of Scottish and Irish poetry inspired by the *GBOI*, Malcolm Maclean writes: "*The Leabhar Mór* is the calf of the *Great Book of Ireland* which is itself one of the many calves of the *Book of Kells*" (Maclean 1). Similarly, a 2013 article written by Theo Dorgan in *The Irish Times* also referenced the modern *Book of Kells* in its headline (Dorgan). This is not to say that there is no relationship; both books were handmade on the island of Ireland, but *The Book of Kells* was primarily made to preserve and showcase liturgy, using the most high-tech craft skills available in the ninth century. In contrast, the makers of the *GBOI,* inspired by Yeats' and Morris's medievalism, chose to use outdated methods because of the symbolic values inherent in them (McGann 5). The archaism of their choices does not, however, conceal the book's modernity. While this narrative can make an attractive headline, it does misleadingly present the *GBOI* as an anomaly: a cultural product that is isolated from influences of its period. To redeploy the analogy of Malcolm Maclean, the *GBOI* is the calf of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement, as will be shown in chapter one.

Although much publicised at the time of its making, the *GBOI* has had a limited critical afterlife to-date. In 1991, Gene Lambert wrote a short article for the *Irish Arts Review* in which he stated: "at the time of writing, the book's eventual destiny is uncertain. On offer at IR£1.2, the makers certainly hope it will find a home in Ireland" (Lambert 149). Over the following two decades, the book received scant critical attention and had virtually no readership. It was envisaged that the acquisition

of the *GBOI* by UCC in 2013 would give the book increased exposure and presence. To this effect, a booklet was produced by UCC with short articles by then President of UCC Michael Murphy, Theo Dorgan and Christopher Clarke (senior curator at Lewis Glucksman Gallery), alongside some high-quality images of the *GBOI* and a full list of contributors. The booklet was made available at the *Facing Pages* exhibition, which ran from April to July 2014 at the Lewis Glucksman Gallery in UCC. The exhibition displayed the *GBOI* along with artwork from contributing artists, photographs, an audio exhibition of poetry and a selection of talks and readings by contributors and key people behind the project. An electronic format of the *GBOI* was also exhibited for the first time. This electronic copy contained scanned high-resolution images of the book which allowed gallery visitors to turn the pages of the *GBOI.* In the same year as *Facing the Pages,* the first external piece of critical commentary appeared contextualising the *GBOI.* The essay about book art, written by Catherine Marshall, appeared in volume V of the Royal Irish Academy's *Art and Architecture of Ireland: Twentieth Century* alongside an image of the *GBOI.* Marshall writes that the *GBOI* was "probably the single biggest collaborative project in the history of Irish art" (Marshall 52). In 2016, an article by UCC librarian Crónán Ó Doibhlin was published by the *Art Libraries Journal*. Ó Doibhlin, Head of Special Collections at Boole Library, documents some of the bibliographic history of the *GBOI*, as well as plans for the book while acknowledging that more work needs to be completed on the book (Ó Doibhlin 198-202). Outside of the exhibition, UCC has not made the *GBOI* readily available to scholars. Because of this, the book remains relatively unknown and its significance is not sufficiently recognised within Irish cultural studies. Without scholarship to critically examine it and provide context, the book remains a cultural enigma; hidden and unknown to communities it claims to

represent.

## A Cultural Muddle

The *GBOI* presents many challenges to the reader. Firstly, with 273 contributors, the book can look and feel congested. Some of the folios contain the work of several poets, a calligrapher and one or more artists. For example, Folio 34 features the work of five contributors all competing for space. These crowded folios lack harmony and instead reflect conflict; as they contain disparate elements of culture infused and mashed together. In many cases throughout the *GBOI*; the images do not match the poems and vice versa. All contributors, except Denis Brown, were given the freedom to choose their work and did not have to respond to previous inscriptions or collaborate with their fellow artists (Dorgan 2014). The outcome in some instances is a 'potluck' as each contributor presents diverse themes side-by-side. In some folios, the collaboration is successful, and in other cases, it is not. Folio 11 is an example where the experimental nature of the *GBOI* produces a hideous outcome (see Figure 5). This folio is dominated by 1980s pop-cultural pink neon paint and graffiti-like imagery, which is in contrast with the poet's handwriting on the vellum and the traditional physical exterior of the *GBOI*. Through its collaborative procedures, the editors introduced an element of randomness into the project; there is no apparent pattern and some of the *GBOI* contributors do not respect the boundaries of their fellow contributors. This can be seen in Folio 123, which is discussed in chapter 2, but almost every folio contains some element of overlapping art forms. It would seem from analysing the books that on the folios of the *GBOI,* there are no rules and chaos ensues in many cases. The lack of strict editorial control and the movement between

and across a variety of media had other consequences too; they allowed the book to expand far beyond its original parameters from an anthology containing the work of fifty poets and fifty artists to a large-scale layered multi-discipline project. The editors did not put reins on the project, which perhaps harmed the reception of the book; its expansiveness and collaborative complexity contribute to the book's invisibly within Irish cultural criticism.

The book's expansion also allowed for the inclusion of art forms not usually associated with literary anthologies. Dorgan and Lambert allowed the work of nine composers to occupy nine folios, or 2.1% of the book. This adds to the sense of a cultural muddle as it feels like the book was overreaching in its ambitions and aims. It also adds difficulty to the book's categorisation. Is the book a true anthology? Or is it something else? What is clear is the daunting size of the *GBOI* prevents a quick review; given the complexity and richness of *GBOI*, no single study on the subject can claim comprehensiveness. While the book is rich, contradictory and in some cases chaotic; a close reading of the *GBOI* does reveal some patterns and themes.

**Inclusivity in The Great Book of Ireland.**

A defining feature of the *GBOI* is its claims to inclusivity; in numerous interviews, the editors promote the inclusive ethos of the book. In some cases, these claims are overemphasised but the *GBOI* is inclusive in terms of how it negotiates the canon, including canonical writers along with non-canonical (or yet-to-be-canonical) writers. A young working-class writer such as Rita Ann Higgins is included in the *GBOI*

along with Noble Laureate Samuel Beckett. The editors had a policy of seeking out subaltern voices; Dorgan has said that both contributors and editors share some common beliefs around inclusion and creating a space for multiplicity:

> Editors and contributors shared a common belief in the absolute right of women to be respected, included and valued as poets and artists; we believed in heterodoxy, and made space for it; we believed in the rights of so-called minority languages, we believed that a true and accurate mirror held up to our times had to be multivalent, had to celebrate and project differences in style and substance, had to pose questions as much as propose answers or make room for statements. (Dorgan iii)

Dorgan's summary reveals an explicitly ideological framework of the *GBOI* that reflects the progressive political ideologies of the era. The mission of the benefactor Clashganna Mills Trust, of giving agency to those marginalised by society by providing an inclusive educational environment for people with disabilities, is also reflected; as a number of disabled artists contributed to the rest page folios of the *GBOI*. In other ways, the book could be said to be inclusive.

The *GBOI* is also an all-island project. Theo Dorgan stated that from the outset, he and Lambert wanted to make sure Northern-Irish artists and poets were included in the book:

> We did not differentiate between Irish artists from the Republic and Irish artists from Northern Ireland when it came to proposing or selecting contributors. This was in part an unreflective position – Poetry Ireland at the time received about 25% of its grant aid from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, poets from North and South had always been included in anthologies of Irish poetry, northern and southern artists were in the habit of studying in, working in and exhibiting in both jurisdictions indiscriminately. Simply put, there was no Border in the arts on the island of Ireland. (Dorgan ii)

Representations of Northern Ireland bring a different perspective to the book; as the *GBOI*'s construction from 1989 to 1993 predates the 1994 IRA ceasefire. In this period of flux and uncertainty, the *GBOI* reflects the anxiety, fear and ongoing crisis of the Troubles. It also reflects a kind of soft Republicanism and a sense of optimism that the ongoing (and secret) talks would result in peace within the region. The inclusion of writers and artists from across the sectarian divide was symbolic and important but not unique to the *GBOI*. Numerous preceding anthologies had included Northern-Irish poets alongside southern poets. The *GBOI* was a different type of anthology, however. The *GBOI* was constructed to be a national treasure, a valuable artefact of the time. Chris Clarke writes how the folios of "the *GBOI* reveal how a nation perceives itself and it wishes to be seen by others" (Clarke 5). This would prove problematic for artists and writers from Northern Ireland. As a contested territory, Northern-Irish representations had the potential to be challenging and intensely political. Paul Muldoon, Rita Duffy, Derek Mahon, Medbh McGuckian,

Eamon O'Doherty, Ciaran Carson, Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney and others represent the North of Ireland within the *GBOI* in complex and meaningful ways.

The book claims to be inclusive in linguistic terms; the *GBOI* has both an English- and Irish-language title. Within the tome, the editors created a space for Irish language poetry to be included. Some Irish language poets were invited to write their poems in more than one folio. Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's poems, for instance, appear in Folio 25 and 95. Theo Dorgan said that he was "determined to ensure a maximal presence for poets in the Irish language" (Dorgan i). The editors adopted an ideological position in relation to the Irish language in terms of seeing Irish poetry to be "a single poetry conducted in two languages" (Dorgan i). This position was "a simplification of the relationship between a given language and its specific cultural matrix", but the editors were "keen to project and reinforce the collegiality of the relationship between poets writing in both languages" (Dorgan i). This ideological position was at variance with some cultural commentators. In his book, *The Dual Tradition*, Thomas Kinsella argues that a twofold approach is necessary to understand Irish poetry. Kinsella says that Irish poets have a divided imagination and Irish poetry exists as two separate cultural histories. The linguistic and cultural fracture following British colonisation of Ireland, resulting in the ineluctable decline and near-loss of the Irish language, left the Irish writer (writing in English and in Irish) in "internal exile" (Kinsella 3). Irish poetry was fragmented, in "exile from itself, yet enriched by its duality" (Badin 212). Many others shared Kinsella's view. The twentieth-century Irish language poet could claim a thousand years of inheritance, but the English language poet could only look back a few centuries:

> The potential Irish poet, looking back for available models, was in a position quite different from his British counterpart, whose ancestry stretched back through the 19th century, the Romantics, Dryden, Milton, Shakespeare. For the Irish poet, there was Yeats, and behind him the weak poets of the 19th century, and behind them, a cultural shift to a different language and virtually lost set of poetic values. (Harmon 45)

The lack of inheritance is troubling to the English language tradition of poetry in Ireland. Equally troubling is the narrative of dispossession and loss prevailing in the Gaelic literary tradition. This tradition, which had a history of over a millennium on the island of Ireland, "had petered out in misery" (Crotty 6). Although the Gaelic tradition had left a rich material culture behind, the language issue made it somewhat inaccessible to poets writing in English. The *GBOI* makes an intervention in these dominant narratives by creating a shared space for both languages. The work of English language poets inhabits the same space as Irish language poets, such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Seán Ó Tuama. Folios 71, 42, 25, 7, 17, 26, 31, 45, 51, 60, 76, 88, 90, 95, 98, 115, 127, 126, and 128 contain Irish language poetry, which amounts to 13.1% of the *GBOI.* A total of eighteen poets inscribed their work in the Irish language. Although the English language poets outnumber the Irish language poets, it is apparent from even a cursory reading that the *GBOI* is not a single language anthology. The Irish language forms a significant element to the book. As well as English and the Irish language, the *GBOI* also contains poems written in Italian and Russian. Like the writers and editors of the Literary Revival,

Dorgan and Lambert *GBOI* could borrow from the past and merge old and new to create new perspectives on tradition.

The editors of the *GBOI* were prepared to move beyond prior representations of Ireland and include other voices and perspectives. The inclusion of women, Irish-speaking, disabled, and Northern-Irish contributors, is a clear indication of the inclusive ideology of the editors. It is evident they held a set of beliefs around inclusion, which was informed by progressive ideologies of the late-twentieth century. Margaret Kelleher's assessment of *The Field Day Anthology*, volumes 4 and 5, as a "new kind of anthology" with "future-shaping significance" that "invites a radical rethinking of issues of authorship, production, genre and canon-formation" might also be applied to the *GBOI* (Kelleher 89). Through its inclusive ideology and multidisciplinary structure, the *GBOI* attempts to reshape some established ideas around Irish literary, visual and material cultures, while reinforcing others. This thesis shows how the *GBOI* had an intention of intersecting and reshaping concepts around Irishness and Irish national identity. The inclusion of the transnational element to the *GBOI* is the most radical element to the tome's desire to unsettle established belief-structures about Ireland and Irishness.

The *GBOI* includes writers and artists from the USA, Romania, the UK, the Czech Republic, Russia, the Caribbean and Italy. Italian poet Mario Luzi inscribed his poem in Italian on Folio 103. Similarly, Bella Akmadulina writes her poem in her naive Russian on Folio 25, alongside the Irish-language poetry of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. The inclusion of international writers and artists acknowledges that the contemporary

"Irish poet or artist is as likely to have been influenced in his or her development by non-Irish as by indigenous sources" (Dorgan ii). It is also symbolic of an increasingly globalised Ireland that was open to and accepting of external influences. Their inclusion was designed to communicate a message of change. At the time the *GBOI* was made, the forces of globalisation and transnationalism were changing the political landscape of Ireland. The passing of the Maastricht Treaty referendum in June 1992, enabling the establishment of a European single market, facilitating the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people within the European community, would bring dramatic changes to Ireland. The treaty was agreed on in December 1991, signed in 1992, and came into being on the 1st January 1993. The single European market in a Post-Soviet Europe transformed Ireland's economy in a very short period of time, leading to an unprecedented level of economic growth in the 1990s. Economically, Ireland was opening and transforming. The capitalist totality of the *GBOI*, that attempts to bring everything into its global orbit, was signalling Ireland's emergence into the confident neo-liberalism of the 1990s.

The editor's wish to construct an ideological framework that signalled equality and allowed room for diversity in a society that was in many ways still inward-looking and insular was ambitious and ground-breaking, although not always successful. The book's claim of inclusivity is overstated in some parts, particularly in relation to gender and how the book is publicised; with the editors promoting the inclusiveness of the book as a way of defining it against other projects; even though men outnumber women by a significant factor.

## *The Great Book of Ireland*: Reflecting Change

The *GBOI* reflects the shifting landscape of Irish society in a nuanced way. R.F. Foster has commented that the rate of change in Ireland in the last three decades of the twentieth century was "bewildering"; the Ireland of the early- to mid-twentieth century, he contends, was "another planet" compared to the Ireland of the 1990s (Foster 3). The *GBOI* was crafted during significant political and social events in Irish history. The single largest event to occur during the book's construction was the election of liberal Mary Robinson as Ireland's first woman president. This result in November 1990 was a clear sign of sustained socio-political change as Robinson was a prominent advocate for the liberalisation of Irish laws. Patricia Coughlan writes that Robinson's election gave women a "sense of collective power from their unprecedentedly independent exercise of their franchise, and her open feminism and support of women's initiatives countrywide generated a utopian optimism" about the role of women and their potential in public life in Ireland (Coughlan 177). Her presidency signalled that a threshold had been crossed in Irish society. As the largest art project undertaken in this period, the *GBOI* reflects the rising tide of fresh ideas and perspectives of a New Ireland in a new and open Europe.

The optimism of Robinson's Ireland is not only represented by the *GBOI* but also directly referred to in its pages. In the marginalia of Folio 70, Belfast poet, Michael Longley christens this period the "New Ireland":

> For Manus Carson […] who is the son of Ciaran Carson who represents the New Ireland as surely as Mary Robinson in the first few days of her presidency. (Folio 70)

Longley's marginalia in *GBOI* gives context to his poem but it also ties his work to a contemporary moment and to the politics of the day. The marginalia is also, of course, a dialogue from across the border; Longley writes from a Northern-Irish perspective on a southern Ireland political event. In a way, showing the links between the two jurisdictions and the acknowledgement that the futures of both parts of the island are inextricably linked. The New Ireland(s) would require cross-border dialogue and cooperation. Globalisation was also at play; as Dorgan states that the contributors "saw themselves, and hence our island, in the light of a confident internationalism" (Dorgan iii). Inspired by globalisation and postmodernism, the *GBOI* would allow space for difference, even if the island's two jurisdictions did not allow for such a space to exist within their restrictive legislative frameworks. The folios act as "sites of dialogue and debate of contrasting viewpoints brought together on a common space" (Clarke 5). They wanted a "true and accurate" account of Ireland to reveal itself on the pages (Dorgan i). It is evident that Dorgan and Lambert were interested in creating a new narrative. However, as already discussed, the materials, the form, and the craft of the *GBOI* are not new, resulting in a contradictory asthenic to the book. In theoretical terms, there is a creative tension between the formalist medievalist structure of the book and the content of the book informed by internationalism and ideas of rhizomatic relationships, crossing borders and endless exchange of signs/multiplicity.

As a first major study, this thesis marks a development in the critical examination of the *GBOI*: a project that is not sufficiently recognised or well-known within the realm of Irish cultural studies. Nineteen folios are closely read and analysed, while many more folios of the *GBOI* are referenced. Each of the nineteen folios chosen are selected as they are relevant to a larger chapter theme. Given the randomised method of production and a large number of contributors, it is near-impossible to make broad statements about the distinctiveness of each folio discussed with respect to the whole collection. However, folios are compared with each other; for instance, Eavan Boland's folio (Folio 43) is contrasted with Samuel Beckett's folio (Folio 53); Michael Longley's folio (Folio 70) is compared with Ciaran Carson's folio (Folio 50). Gradually concealed aspects of the *GBOI* reveal themselves such as the differing manners canonical writers are sometimes treated with regards to space in the folios. The thematic approach undertook aims to contextualise and map the *GBOI* within Irish cultural discourse; it examines the book through the framework of four themes. Firstly, the history of Irish poetry book publishing; secondly, the relationship of word and image within the *GBOI*; thirdly the gendered elements of the book; fourthly, the relationship between national and transnational politics within the *GBOI*. This thematic approach intends to build a foundation of understanding of the *GBOI*; drawing on book history as well as Irish cultural, literary and art criticism, the thesis aims to expand the understanding of the *GBOI* and highlight the need for wider access to the *GBOI.*

Chapter one explores the material culture of Irish poetry and maps the influences of

the indigenous poetry publishing industry on the *GBOI.* The chapter discusses significant foundational collections and anthologies and reflects upon their wider impacts. In particular, it maps the influence of the Yeats siblings and the Arts and Crafts movement on the production, reception, and material identity of the Irish poetry book. It pays specific attention to the groundwork established by the Revivalists – their motivations and influences. Drawing on the scholarship of George Bornstein, Jerome McGann, Anne Ferry, Bill Brown, David Holdeman, Barbara Benedict and others, the chapter maps the line of influence from the Arts and Crafts movement up to the time of the *GBOI.* It discusses the publications of Cuala; Maunsel; Three Candles; Dolmen; Gallery; and Salmon Presses and how they have shaped the vessel of Irish poetry. The book as an art object and a 'thing' is also discussed which shows that the historical legacies of the Irish poetry book also impact and shape our reading and understanding of the *GBOI.*

The second chapter examines the interaction of word and image, specifically through the textual interplay between Irish letters and Irish visual culture. It discusses how the *GBOI*'s folios reveal deep-seated cultural tensions between word and image, and also how the historical relationship between word and image informs the book's design and content. It examines the role of the calligrapher Denis Brown, who worked extensively on the book. I draw on recent scholarship on Irish art, as well as theory from influential art historians such as Dorothy Walker. Writing in 1976, Walker states that "the visual arts are still in full reaction to the overpowering influence of language" and a feeling prevails that the visual arts will be "swallowed again by the writers" (Walker 14). The chapter argues that *GBOI* is a unique and important

artefact for the study of text-image relations within Irish culture.

Chapter three examines the gendered dimensions within the *GBOI*; the chapter looks at why the editors extensively highlight the women's contributors in their promotion and presentation of the book and if its claims to inclusivity are overclaimed. I argue that the bibliographic codes of the *GBOI* are informed by gendered social constructs which act against each other. The chapter also considers why many women writers used their platform within the *GBOI* to challenge prevailing discourses and stereotypes around the cultural representations of Irish women by close reading the work of a number of women poets in the *GBOI,* including Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan, Heather Brett, Rita Ann Higgins, Eithne Strong, Mary Dorcey and Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill. The 1980s was a time of "extraordinary social and political turmoil in Ireland", with the "successive abortion referenda putting the issue of changing sexual and gender roles at the centre of political life" in the Republic (Meaney 18). This chapter shows how the *GBOI* reflects this turmoil and is perhaps best understood as a record of changing and uncertain times.

Chapter four examines representations of national and transnational politics within the *GBOI*. It explores how the contributors of the *GBOI* negotiate Northern Ireland. As stated, the inclusion of Northern-Irish writers and artists was an integral part of the inclusive ideology of the book. The inaugural contributors chosen for the book by the editors were two Catholic poets from the North of Ireland. The chapter contextualises both visual and verbal responses to the North and to the 'Troubles' as found in the *GBOI*. It examines the transnational element within the *GBOI* and how globalisation

intersects with art on the pages of the *GBOI* and promises a transcending vision of Irishness. Chapter four pays particular attention to the work of poets Máire Mhac an Tsaoi, Paul Muldoon, Ciaran Carson, and Michael Longley, as well as artists Rita Duffy, Eamonn O'Doherty and Mary Earl Powers.

As the first comprehensive study of the *GBOI,* this thesis offers the first in-depth analysis of nineteen folios of the *GBOI,* along with the fullest discussion to-date of the book's beginnings. The vast array of narratives and contributors is bewildering, but the scale of the project is also a great asset, as the book uniquely displays the variance and vastness of Irish creativity. It has taken almost thirty years for a comprehensive study of the *GBOI* to emerge on this scale, as the book – unlike other one-copy manuscripts – is not readily available to scholars in physical or digital form. The poem on Folio 107 of the *GBOI* by Eva Bourke*,* which says, "The pages of this book breath and extend and open with the slowness of the seasons" correctly summarises the scarcity of the contemporary impact of the book (Folio 107). This thesis places and gives context to the *GBOI*, by slowly unfolding the influences that underpin the makeup of the book. In his essay "The Book as Symbol", Brian Cummings writes that the book as an object achieves a "mystery of transforming what appears to be purely immaterial and conceptual into something with concrete form" (Cummings 63). While the *GBOI*'s legacy and future-shaping significance are still revealing itself, one thing is for certain; the *GBOI* gives "concrete form" to the immensity and ingenuity of the Irish cultural imagination at the end of the twentieth century.



Figure 5: Folio 11, *The Great Book of Ireland*. Durcan, Paul. Cullen, Michael.

# I

## A Cultural History of the Irish Poetry Book

> The need to communicate from one to another a variety of unaltered ideas, free of aesthetic or political censorship, in the belief that ideas have a life of their own, independent of their value as commodities, has compelled poets, artists, and all those dedicated to the life of the mind to undertake, the publication of their intellectual and artistic commitments, from Luther to Thomas Paine and the Russian samizdat movement, from William Blake and William Morris to Diether Roth and Ed Ruscha. (Hugo 5; *The Artist Publisher*)

How do historical legacies of book production within Ireland shape our understanding of the *GBOI*? This chapter explores this question by tracking the recent cultural history of the Irish poetry book. It discusses the movements that shaped the Irish poetry book's history: from nationalism to the Arts and Crafts movement, to Revivalism and postmodern inclusivity. Beginning with *The Cabinet of Irish Literature;* this chapter creates an enabling genealogy for the *GBOI* which helps to shape my later account of its meaning. It examines how indigenous small Irish poetry presses played a major role in reviving a culture of book production during the twentieth century in Ireland. Presses like Cuala Press set a precedent within Irish culture (influenced by socio-political contexts) by politicising the materiality of its books as a form of cultural resistance.

As a whole, the study of book history allows for a more expansive view of a nation's cultural history. The multi-volume publication *The Oxford Companion to the Irish*

*Book* attests to this sentiment and has given prominence to book history within Irish studies. Small presses such as the Cuala Press, Dolmen Press, New Writers' Press, Gallery Press and Salmon played, and continue to play, a significant role in the social, cultural and political debates in the twentieth century, creating a platform and audience for Irish poetry. They also shape and continue to shape discourses on anthologising and canon-formation that equally inform the *GBOI*. Indeed, the material politics of Irish poetry are bound up with symbolism relating to cultural nationalism and the need to draw lines between Ireland and the UK. These small poetry presses brought into sharper focus issues of materiality and the politics of Irish identity. The contribution of the presses to the Irish cultural economy has yet to be extensively explored.

## Historical Considerations

In 1644, John Milton wrote: "books are not absolutely dead things" but possess "a life beyond life" (Milton qtd in Nicolas 2). Similarly, in "The Book as Symbol", Brian Cummings explores the idea of the book as a sacred object, embodying both the author and reader: "a potency of life" (Cummings 63). He concludes by writing, "Even as the book is demystified and deconsecrated in the modern world, its symbolic value endures" (Cummins 65). The symbolism and indeed "life beyond life" of the Irish book reveal the historical trajectory of the island. Writing about the biographical heritage of Irish-language publications in the nineteenth century, Claire Hutton aptly sums up its history as "full of gaps and silences" (Hutton 3). This description could indeed be applied to the history of the Irish book, per se. Spanning from a sixth-century manuscript tradition to the "indie" publishing houses of the

twenty-first century, the narrative of the Irish book is a complex one. Its function and appropriation shifted depending on the historical context, particularly during the Reformation, periods of political agitation and rebellion, and within the context of late-nineteenth-century Irish nationalism (Ó Ciosáin and Hutton 194). The Irish book has been both feared and revered – sometimes, paradoxically, by the same institutions. In the sixth century, under the leadership of St Columba, the aesthetic of the Irish book spread to the island of Iona, to Lindisfarne off the Northumbria coast, and other places shaping the idea of the modern book (Harthan 16). From an early historical period, then, Irish identity is linked inextricably with the symbolism of book culture.

The modern Irish book's narrative began in 1551 when the first book was printed in Ireland (Ó Ciosáin and Hutton 195). For the next hundred years, the island's publishing output was controlled by the exclusive rights of the King's printer, and all books produced were Anglican and in the English language (Ó Ciosáin and Hutton 195). The British Copyright Act of 1710, also referred to as the Statute of Anne, did not apply to books printed in Ireland (Pollard 17; Ó Ciosáin and Hutton 195). The act, which sought to protect intellectual property in Britain, led to a large "reprint trade" in Ireland during the eighteenth century (Pollard 17; Ó Ciosáin and Hutton 195). Copyrighted books could be reproduced legally in Ireland and sold in domestic or international markets (Pollard 17-18). The consequences had advantages and disadvantages: while the Irish book trade flourished, it was an industry that relied on piracy.

During this period, inexpensive mass-produced books from Ireland flooded the North American and Caribbean markets (Ó Ciosáin Hutton 195). Focusing on the relationship between Scottish authors and their publishers, Richard B. Sher draws on a number of letters from publishers during the late eighteenth century that are dismissive of the Irish bookmaking trade. In one letter from the publisher Strahan to his associate William Creech, dated 19th November 1778, the publisher writes that the Irish reprinting trade and "the laying open [of] Literary property in Britain are two incurable evils" (qtd. in Sher 447). Two years later, Strahan comments furthermore that the Irish "immediately reprint in an inferior size, and a low price, every new book the instant it is published here" (qtd. in Sher 447). British publishers could not compete fairly with the buoyant reprint trade that existed in Ireland. Britain's Act of Union in 1801 ended the trade as its copyright laws came into effect in Ireland (Pollard 201; Ó Ciosáin, Hutton 195). This legislation effectively shut down Dublin's publishing industry, as the enforcement of copyright legislation did not stimulate or justify a legitimate Irish publishing industry. Ó Ciosáin and Hutton comment that a "consequence of the lack of copyright law in Ireland" was that Irish authors had "their work published in London initiating a trend that continued long after the reprint trade had ended" (Ciosáin Hutton 195). Irish writers continued the prevailing tendency during the nineteenth century to continue to look towards London, as there was no market for a writer to make a living in Ireland (Ó Ciosáin, Hutton 195; Campbell 500; Murphy 2).

Justin Quinn states that some Irish poets writing in English viewed their body of work as "part" of the British canon and wrote for a "British audience" (Quinn 8). Other

critics, such as Matthew Campbell in *Poetry Under the Union 1801-1924,* reject this viewpoint, seeing the poetry of nineteenth-century Ireland as innovative and innately Irish but situated within a larger British imperial context (Campbell 3-7). In the late-nineteenth century, a number of publications attempted to draw lines between British and Irish writing. One such publication was a British-published anthology of Irish writing *The Cabinet of Irish Literature.* This anthology made a significant mark and, in many ways, became a catalyst for an indigenous publishing culture within Ireland.

*The Cabinet of Irish Literature* was published in four volumes between 1879 and 1880 by Glasgow-based publisher Blackie and Son. The anthology made a strong cultural statement about the prospects of writing on the island of Ireland: the book was inclusive in its editorial approach and featured a wide variety of writing (poetry, prose, memoir, oratory) in both the Irish and English language as well as work by both genders. Charles Anderson Read, assisted by his wife Mrs Read, edited the first three volumes of the publication while T.P. O'Connor edited the fourth volume. Both editors were part of the London-based, Irish-born professional classes and supported the Home Rule movement (Kelleher 75). Margaret Kelleher writes that the editors had an acute sense of their cultural nationalism and the power the anthology had in developing "a national historical, social, and cultural awareness" (Kelleher 76). O'Connor's preface to the fourth edition makes this point acutely. He writes that "we" had become "accustomed to read and hear of many writers as belonging to English literature" and "are liable to forget their connection with Ireland" (O'Connor preface). O'Connor saw it "necessary for the purpose of enabling the literary history of Ireland to be traced in a systematic manner; and not the literary history only, but

also the historical and social development of the people" (O'Connor preface).[2] Both editors saw the anthology as a means of "cultural repossession"; a means in which to claim back a literary tradition that had been "absorbed" by English tradition (Kelleher 78). From their vantage point in London, they saw how literature and specifically the anthology could be used as a political tool to reclaim Ireland.

The anthologies' intersection with politics was a phenomenon which can be traced back to Britain; Barbara Benedict writes that eighteenth-century anthologies in England were presented "as works of social art"; a selection of texts chosen "on consistent principles that illustrate social values" and selections that will "'reform' English culture" (Benedict 12). While early eighteenth-century editors restrict their discourse of reform to the advancement of "poetic and linguistic values", later editors cite "moral advancement" as their goal (Benedict 12). This, she argues, represents a novel belief in the social power of literature to wield influence over readers and impact culture: "literary culture as the locus of progressive thought, the site of social change: literary values become social values" (Benedict 12). In Irish terms, Benedict's comments are illuminating; anthologies of Irish literature were strategic tools to promote and create a sense of identity and unity; to promote social values informed by cultural nationalism among readers and writers. According to Benedict, anthologies "promote the commodification of literature" by inspiring people to not only buy and collect literature, but also write it. In this sense, a popular anthology could be a catalyst for the production of new literary cultures; a site of creation and community. The reader can identify a "commonplace" and writers can "recognise themselves within a common culture" (Price 104). National anthologies, like *The*

*Cabinet of Irish Literature,* could transmit social values, recontextualise texts, reshape literary history and create distinctions between nations.

In *Tradition and the Individual Poem*, Anne Ferry writes that although the word anthology has a number of different origins; the Greek roots translate as "anthos (flower + legein (to gather)": a gathering of flowers (Ferry 13). In its loosest definition, it is a grouping of short pieces of writing by more than one or two authors; selected by an external editor (Ferry 31). Ferry writes that anthologies had accumulated their own history and tradition by the mid-nineteenth century and some publications such as Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury of the Best Song and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (1861), had come to be seen as national treasures in Britain (Ferry 41). Read and O'Connor drew on the popularity and conventions of the genre and aimed to emulate the successes of previous publications to take on national significance. Although Read did not live to witness the publication, the endeavour was an immense success. The frequent reprinting of the volume attests to *The Cabinet's* popularity and its success in disseminating ideas which contributed to the growing sense of national selfhood developing within and outside of Ireland.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Cabinet of Irish Literature,* the Irish poet and novelist Katharine Tynan was commissioned to edit a new four-volume edition of the publication. Tynan, with Yeats and others, had been instrumental in the publication of the earlier Revivalist anthology, *Ballads and Poems of Young Ireland* (1888). The new *Cabinet of Irish Literature* was published between 1902 and 1903,

by the London-based sister company of the original publishers, Gresham Publishing Company (Kelleher 83). In the introduction to the anthology, Tynan acknowledged the political and cultural shift, which was taking place within Ireland fuelled by Revivalist ideologies and the cultural nationalism movement (Tynan i). Margaret Kelleher commented that the fourth volume was a "significant achievement, providing a contemporary evaluation of the Literary Revival and its key writers, as they appeared in 1902" (Kelleher 87). There were, however, some significant changes between the two versions of *The Cabinet*. Firstly, Tynan reduced the amount of Irish-language selections and secondly, she reduced the oratorical selections, narrowing the range of kinds of writings represented (Kelleher 84). She also removed writing by Lord Castlereagh and the Duke of Wellington, deletions which "appear motivated by a political and denominational bias" (Kelleher 84). Tynan's *Cabinet* was the first significant Irish anthology of the century, where the anthologist was also a poet, initiating a trend of the poet as anthology-maker that continued throughout the century in Ireland.[3] The genre was a useful tool for an "author's self-presentation" as poets could edit anthologies to suit their interests and recontextualise literary culture to situate their work. (Ferry 222). The prominence of Revivalist literature in Tynan's *Cabinet* attests to an acute awareness in the power of the genre to reshape literary history to align with the energies of the Revivalist movement in which she was a central figure.

Both editions of *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* helped propel the cultural distinctiveness of Ireland to a wide readership. However, as the anthologies were products of the British publishing industry, they were not Irish books in the strictest

terms. Across the Atlantic Ocean, the American-printed *Irish Literature* (1904) would also anthologise Irish writing, but this book would not find its way to Irish bookshops as it was essentially created for Irish-American readers. James Joyce would famously imagine Irish culture at this time as "the cracked looking glass of a servant" in *Ulysses* (Joyce 6). Politically, socially and culturally, the Revivalists at the beginning of the twentieth century sought to cut ties with the empire; they wanted to reclaim the Irish book by drawing lines between books produced in Ireland and books produced in Britain. Like the anthology genre, the material politics of Irish book became another strategic tool in promoting nationalism and Irish cultural autonomy.

The need to de-Anglicise the Irish book is perhaps best illustrated in a letter J.M. Synge sent to his publisher Elkin Matthews in 1905:

> About our project for my book on Aran. It has been suggested that the new publishing house in Dublin – Maunsel & Co. – should bring it out and I have thought it best to agree for several reasons. One or two of my plays have made me very unpopular with a section of our Irish Catholic public, and I feel it will be a great advantage to me to have this book printed and published in Dublin on Irish paper – small matters that are nevertheless thought a good deal of over here. (Synge 136)

Influenced by W.B. Yeats, Synge was aware of the need to sever ties with Britain in not only intellectual, but also material ways. Synge's letter highlights the

politicisation of publishing in Ireland and the uneasy position of Anglo-Irish writers. He presented his argument as a logical step in appeasing his readership in Ireland while moving his own sense of cultural nationalism forward a step. This was, in effect, a politicised move to sever ties with London publishing while still maintaining a publishing presence. In 1907, the year of the infamous Playboy riots at the Abbey Theatre, Maunsel in Dublin and Elkin Matthews in London jointly published *The Aran Islands*. The book featured drawings by Jack B. Yeats and was one of the landmark publications of Maunsel. Evidently, Synge was influenced by a small private press that was at the forefront of reinventing the image of the Irish book. The work of the Dun Emer and Cuala Press changed the landscape of the Irish book and restored a craft and a tradition of making books on the island of Ireland.

## "On Irish Paper": Material Politics and Cuala Press

In the winter of 1902, the Dun Emer Guild was founded in the home of Evelyn Gleeson in Dundrum, Dublin. Gleeson established the company with "a wish to find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things […] of the spirit and tradition of the country" (Miller 14). Gleeson was greatly influenced by the feminist movement. Dun Emer would exclusively hire women workers, claiming in its first prospectus that "the education of the work-girls is also part of the idea, they are taught to paint and their brains and fingers are made more active and understanding" (Miller 14). The industry was named after Emer, the wife of Cuchulain. Lady Gregory had brought the mythical figure of Emer to the public's attention in 1902 in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. The press was established as a complement to other crafts,

such as weaving and embroidery. The sister of W.B. Yeats, Elizabeth Corbett Yeats, took responsibility of the press from the outset. In London, Gleeson and Yeats had witnessed the Arts and Craft movement led by William Morris of the Kelmscott Press and Emery Walker founder of the Victoria Press (Holdeman 51). The Kelmscott Press aesthetic was deliberately designed to "recall the revolutionary bookwork of the fifteenth century", particularly the early printed books that closely resembled the "decorated medieval manuscript books scripted in […] Gothic bookhands" (McGann *Black Riders* 77). Morris started a movement in the late-nineteenth century of "bibliographic resistance" against "commercial book production" (McGann 7). This form of neo-romantic defiance relied heavily on the concept of medievalism. Morris wished for the book to be reinstated as an art object: a possession to be valued and sought after.

Morris and his followers wished to return "to an earlier, craft-based method of book production" in an effort to "step aside from the processes and products of the age of mechanical reproduction" (McGann *Black Riders* 5). W.B. Yeats, the chief literary adviser to Dun Emer, was also an admirer of Morris and medievalism as a style of retrieval. The influence of Morris is attested to in the numerous mentions of him in Yeats' *Autobiographies.* The Dun Emer Press adapted the ideologies behind these British private presses and developed them to suit its own cultural resistance (Brown 31). The first prospectus of Dun Emer in 1903 clearly aligns itself with Morris' movement by referencing his name twice and basing the industry on the ideals he had created (Brown 31). The prospectus defined itself against the history of making quick

and cheap books on the island of Ireland. The press situated itself in a new space informed by cultural nationalism and feminist ideologies:

> Though many books are printed in Ireland, book printing as an art has not been practised here since the eighteenth century. […] the paper has been made of linen rags and without bleaching chemicals, at the Saggart Mill in the county Dublin. The pages are printed at a Hand Press by Miss E. C. Yeats, and simplicity is aimed at in their composition (qtd. in Miller 29).

Karen Brown writes that the enterprise represented an interesting "conflation of the ideals and aesthetics of the English Arts and Crafts movement" and the Irish Cultural Revival (Brown 31). Gleeson and the Yeats sisters created a press and an enterprise that was politically radicalising and an outlet for cultural resistance in Ireland. Employment at "Dun Emer became a way-station, almost a rite of passage, for many young women involved in nationalist enterprises: future writers, painters, Sinn Fein Activists and Abbey Actresses served their time there" (Foster 275). The training and hiring of Irish girls are perhaps the most visible form of Dun Emer's cultural resistance, but the resistance could also be seen in the products that they produced: in their books and art.

The integrity of the raw material and the origins of the materials was a central concern for Dun Emer. Both the prospectus and the first book produced by Dun Emer, W.B Yeats' *In the Seven Woods,* signalled that the material of the book was

from Ireland. Even the location of the mill is revealed to reiterate this point. The paper, “crisp, thin lightly toned mould-made”, was bought from the Swiftbrook paper mill in Saggart in south Co. Dublin (Miller 31). McGann notes in *The Textual Condition* that William Morris also used this type of mould-made paper (McGann 5). This type of paper was considered an outdated and expensive method to manufacture paper by industries at this time (McGann 5). The paper and the naming of it was a part of bibliographical resistance, another “strand” of defiance (McGann 6). The Irish paper and the naming of it was a material way of forming cultural resistance. Jerome McGann makes a distinction between the bibliographic code encompassing the paratext, the device, ink, paper, the colophon, typeface and the other physical features of the book, and the “linguistic code”: the literary text created by the author (McGann 56-62). Meaning is transmitted through “bibliographical code as well as linguistic code” (McGann 56-62). The materiality of the book, the Irish paper and Irish linen, transmitted a clear political message that strongly influenced the reading of the text. Interestingly, the American Macmillan version of Dun Emer’s first book was electrotyped on inexpensive paper and, by all accounts, despite its limited print-run of 400 copies, resembled a mass-produced product which pointed the American readers towards an altogether different ideological destination (Holdeman 57-65). The contrast between the two editions of *In the Seven Woods* serves to highlight the cultural nationalist significance Gleeson and the Yeats siblings wished to encode in their Dun Emer publication. Dun Emer created bibliographic codes which changed how Irish texts and writers would be read. The bibliographic codes *In the Seven Woods* (1903) would mark a change in Yeats’ career, not only in terms of his publisher but also in content and how he wished to be read (Bornstein 3).

Holdeman expands Bornstein's thesis further in *Much Labouring: The Texts and Authors of Yeats's First Modernist Books*, writing that the publication was "radical in departure" in content and modes of production (Holdeman 26-31). W.B. along with his sister Elizabeth, and Emery Walker constructed a "fundamentally new and fundamentally modernist bibliographical architecture" (Holdeman 26- 31):

> Surprisingly, Yeats' remaking of his poetics between 1899 and 1903 seems to have involved not only changes in his language or in his strategies for ordering his volumes or even in the bibliographic architecture of his books but also in his attitudes toward women and his treatment of gender antinomies. (Holdeman 72)

The radical modernist ideologies of *In the Seven Woods* laid the foundation for how the press, Yeats' poetics and indeed Irish poetry would develop. Although, as David Holdeman illustrates, the seismic change did not register with the reading public, or indeed with critics, for some time, owing to the limited printing run of the 1903 Dun Emer/Cuala and Macmillan editions (Holdeman 97). As a result, Holderman points out that "for more than" a decade after, his readers considered him primarily as a "dreamy aesthete", misunderstanding the "evolution" of "his modernism and of his thinking" on "Irish politics and gender" (Holdeman 97).

The Dun Emer Press published eleven books in total. In 1908, a dispute between Evelyn Gleeson, Elizabeth, and Lily Yeats, led to the separation of the press from

Evelyn Gleeson and Dun Emer Industries. The press, now renamed the Cuala Press, relocated to Cuala, in south Co. Dublin. However, the problems continued for the press in its new location; Elizabeth and W.B had "constant disputes" (Yeats M. 7). Their arguments would reach such a level that their father would get involved, scolding his son for writing "such offensive letters to Elizabeth" (Yeats M. 7). In *Family Secrets: William Butler Yeats and His Relatives,* William M. Murphy surveys the constant tension the family endured due to the press. Despite these setbacks, Cuala endured and continued producing beautiful books in a Morris style aesthetic.

Illustration and imagery are an important part of the bibliographic code of the Cuala Press. The devices used by Cuala Press changed regularly; the most recognisable and first device, the "Lady Emer", first appeared in 1907, in *Twenty One Poems* by Katharine Tynan. This woodcut print, designed by Elinor Monsell depicted the Lady Emer standing by a tree (Miller 106) (see Figure 1a). Monsell had also been commissioned to cut a device depicting Queen Maeve and a wolfhound for the Abbey Theatre (Miller 106). This and other commissions gave prominence to woman artists. The press changed pressmarks frequently and moved away from solely Irish representations. Robert Gregory designed a bell, waterfall and fish device that was first used in *A Book of Saint and Wonders* in 1906. Gregory also designed at W.B Yeats' insistence the unicorn pressmark for his publication, *Discoveries* in 1907 (Miller 49). In 1921, Yeats would ask T. Surge Moore to design a new pressmark of an image of a hawk for *Four Years* (Miller 77). In 1925, a device entitled "a lone tree in Irish landscape" by Elizabeth Yeats appeared in *Love's BitterSweet,* translations from Irish by Robin Flower (Miller 85). It is also worth noting Jack Yeats'

involvement in the press. Cuala Press produced twenty-two hand-coloured prints by Jack Yeats depicting various Irish landscapes between 1908 and 1937 (Skelton 370). The aesthetics of the press steered away from established symbols of Irish nationalism, such as Celtic designs, shamrocks and harps. These symbols would eventually be used by the Irish Free State from 1922, but as Terence Brown highlights, by the late-nineteenth century, "these symbols of Irish identify had become hackneyed and vulgar" (Brown 68 1985). Aesthetically the prints, woodcarvings and hand-stitched book structure were a central element of how Elizabeth and W.B. Yeats wished to convey their Irish nationalist ideology. They wanted to expand the imagined sense of Ireland with authority and integrity by the collaborative books they produced. Involving a whole host of artists also fostered collaboration, creating interpersonal and intertextual relationships, which built community among the artisanal and artistic scenes. Karen Brown writes that the "interdisciplinary was at the heart of the Yeats family" (Brown 3 2011). The intersection of written word, image, object, and language pushed Irish art forms into new realms of possibility. In summary, Cuala Press's new graphic representations of Ireland sought to exemplify the whole Irish culture.

## The Cuala Paratext

Another bibliographic code utilised by Cuala Press was its paratext. In his book *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette writes how the paratext is "more than a boundary or a sealed border" but an area of control that seeks to determine how the text will be received and understood:

> [the paratext] enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary […], the pretext is, rather, a threshold […] a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it. (Genette 1)

What Genette refers to as the "zone between text and off-text" is given great significance in Cuala Press as the paratext shares a similar size and font with the poems. Bornstein remarks that this was "partly because of limited resources and partly on principle" (Bornstein 61). The paratext in, *In The Seven Woods* set a precedent like other aspects of the bibliographic code that continued in future publications:

> Here ends *In The Seven Woods*, written by William Butler Yeats, printed, upon paper made in Ireland, and published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats at the Dun Emer Press, in the house of Evelyn Gleeson at Dundrum in the county of Dublin, Ireland, finished the sixteenth day of July, in the year of the big wind 1903. (Yeats *In The Seven Woods n. pag.*)

Later publications by Yeats, such as his 1914 poetry collection *Responsibilities,* would contain four pages of paratext concluding the book (Bornstein 60-61). It is interesting how Dun Emer/Cuala Press publications were, in essence, preoccupied with their own construction of Irishness and how the paratext influenced this construction. The paratext allowed the Yeatses to root the press in the Irish cultural landscape. As much as the material form of the book itself, the paratext was steeped in aspects of Irish culture, especially Hiberno-English speech patterns. Terms such as the "big wind" draw a connection with not only the speech patterns of the period, but of past events rooted in the collective folk memory. The term is, of course, refers to the storm of 1903, but also the Oíche na Gaoithe Mór, the hurricane of 1839 that, owing to its destructive gravity, had become part of Irish folk history. The reference to actual events located in folk memory continued in other Cuala publications. The Yeates used dating systems derived from Irish folk memory rather than the formal calendar. Books announced themselves completed on All-Hallows Eve (*Twenty One Poems* by Lionel Johnson, 1904), May Eve (*Synge and the Ireland of His Time* by W.B Yeats 1911), and even St. John's Eve (*The Post Office* by Rabindranath Tagore, 1914). The Yeatses perhaps took their inspiration from Gerald Griffin's *Tales of Munster Festivals* (1827), where the short stories are organised according to the Irish folk calendar.

Whatever the influence, the (almost informal) focus on pagan and ritualistic folk culture in the paratext did leave the press and Elizabeth and Lily Yeats open to ridicule, most famously in *Ulysses,* where Buck Mulligan critically summarises the press as "five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and the fishgods of

Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind" (Joyce 11). Joyce may be playfully teasing in his exaggerated critique, but it does draw attention to the text that frames the content in Cuala Press publications. The Yeatses had carefully crafted a patchwork of Irishness; their product printed on quality Irish paper (and made from Irish linen), by Irish hands, with graphics and content (by Irish artists and writers), influenced by Irish myths, and even the paratext steeped in the Irish landscape and folklore. Holdeman refers to this as a "multi-layered texture of ideological commitments" that constitutes the press's makeup (Holdeman 42). The "strategy" was complex, but it steered the reader into a Yeatsian view of nationalism. By a variety of approaches, both culturally and materially, the Yeatses created a new Irish cultural product that did not contain the Gaelic language. This would purposely contrast with the Gaelic League's vision of an Ireland based primarily around the Irish language. The materiality of the book's composition along with its folk-saturated paratext sought and in effect delivered cultural authority. Referring to W.B. Yeats' first collection *The Wanderings* o*f Oisin* (1889), Declan Kiberd writes that Yeats tried to recreate "the Gaelic Golden age", but working from "a version of a version" of the original Gaelic from his seat at the "British Museum" he only created a "Celtic colouring" (Kiberd 137). The invention of Cuala Press and its bibliographic architecture allowed Yeats to bypass such criticism in later work. For instance, George Bornstein writes that Yeats' 1914 collection *Responsibilities* "gestures" towards a "more large-minded conception of nationality" and an idea of bookmaking that "respects the integrity of materials rather than trying to reproduce linguistic codes as cheaply as possible" (Bornstein 61). Cuala Press was central to W.B. Yeats' vision to de-Anglicizise and move beyond a mere imitation or "Celtic colouring". The ideology behind the press was tied to the poet's persona. By inventing the model,

Yeats could situate himself comfortably within it. The press was central to the re-invention of his public image, his own poetics and the aesthetics of Irish poetry publications right up to present day.

Cuala Press would publish over sixty books from 1908 to 1947. The period between 1914 and 1922 was perhaps the most difficult, with the Great War, War of Independence and the Civil War naturally preventing production. In 1923, the press moved into the basement of W.B. Yeats and his wife George's house in 82 Merrion Square Dublin, before moving again to 13 Lower Baggot Street in 1925 (Miller 80-84). In 1928, the press published its only anthology, *A Little Anthology of Modern Irish Verse*. This anthology, edited by Lennox Robinson, had a print-run of 300 copies and featured twenty-three poems by twenty poets, including Lady Gregory, Yeats and A.E. The limited print runs of Cuala was perhaps one of the reasons why W.B. Yeats had to constantly refinance the press until his death in 1939 (Yeats 7). The cost of the books also made the press elitist. After Elizabeth Yeats' death in the following year, George Yeats took over the running of the press. Her presence was felt almost immediately. The press added Patrick Kavanagh, Elizabeth Bowen and Louis MacNeice to its list of authors. George's first publication was the poetry collection *The Last Ditch* by Louis MacNeice in 1940. A number of publications in tribute to her husband followed. *The Great Hunger* by Patrick Kavanagh was published in 1942. In 1946, the press suddenly ceased publication. Lily Yeats died in 1949. The press continued to sell hand-coloured prints and cards until the death of George Yeats in 1968 (Miller 138). In 1969, the Press was re-established, with Michael B. Yeats, Anne Yeats, Thomas Kinsella and Liam Miller as directors (Miller

138). The venture was not a commercial success. Throughout its lifetime, Cuala did not receive any substantial state support. From 1925, Irish language publishing was heavily subsidised and *An Gúm* absorbed funding that might have otherwise be used to grow a sustainable English-language Irish publishing industry.

**Maunsel Press and the Three Candles Press**

In contrast to Cuala, Maunsel and Company Ltd made less expensive poetry books from conventional print technology. George Roberts and Seamus Sullivan established the Maunsel and Company Ltd. in 1905 (Hutton 39). The press published almost 600 titles in its existence from 1905 to 1926 (Gardiner 3). Maunsel would gain notoriety for refusing to print James Joyce's, *The Dubliners.* It did, however, publish many other works of Irish drama, fiction, essays, political texts and poetry. Like Cuala, Maunsel was keen to promote its Irish identity; it carried a "Made in Ireland" trademark: "déanta in Eirinn" (Hutton 37). The press did not, however, print all of its books in Ireland (Hutton 38). In contrast to Cuala, Maunsel was not as concerned with the book as an art object. Maunsel was, however, keen to set itself apart from the other Irish publishers. Hutton writes that the "Arts and Crafts style of book production afforded Dun Emer and Maunsel the opportunity to set a distance" between their publications and the many "cheap and badly printed books published in Ireland" (Hutton, 38). W.B. Yeats had a certain anxiety about the press. In his 1916 collection, *Responsibilities*, a poem titled "To a Poet, who would have me Praise certain Bad Poets, Imitators of His and Mine" was aimed at the Maunsel Press poets:

> You say, as I have often given tongue
>
> In praise of what another's said or sung,
>
> 'Twere politic to do the like by these;
>
> But was there ever dog that praised his fleas? (Yeats 105)

Yeats' estimation of the Maunsel Press poets as parasites would perhaps tarnish the press. Maunsel did have some merits, publishing the collected works of J.M. Synge and Padraig Pearse (Hutton 36). The press also published Austin Clarke's early volumes and the poetry of Katharine Tynan and a number of other women writers. David Gardiner states in the preface to *The Maunsel Poets* that the women poets published by Maunsel were "the eldest and most established of the Maunsel Poets" (15). Gardiner lists these poets as Katharine Tynan (1861-1931), Dora Sigerson Shorter (1866-1918), Alice Milligan (1866-1953), Susan Mitchell (1866-1926), Ella Young (1867-1956) and Eva Gore-Booth (1870-1926) (15). By 1915, the *Irish Book Lover* would praise Maunsel as achieving the near-impossible by establishing "a market in Ireland for Irish books" (Hutton 45). Despite its obvious qualities, the press's legacy has been overshadowed by Yeats' commentary and Roberts' divisive nature. Thomas Kinsella writes that: Maunsel's "survival would have made no difference: it was not an adequate professional publisher […] there was no kind in Ireland" (Kinsella 133). The press disbanded in 1926; the majority of its writers would look to self-printing or to England, but only a few would succeed in getting published.

The Three Candles Press would arguably take Maunsel's place (after Cuala) as one of the main poetry publishers in Ireland. The press was established by Colm Ó Lochlainn and operated in Dublin from 1916 to 1969. The publications of the press reflected the new Irish State's mixture of Catholicism and nationalism. Examples of the books printed include *Two Hundred Years with the Redemptorists 1732-1932* and *The Rebellion of 1803*. In poetry, the press published collections such as *The Passing Years: A Book of Verse* by Hester Sigerson was impacted by the need to be commercial in such an insular landscape. The aesthetics of the Three Candle's book design were unimaginative and plain. It did, however, publish some interesting texts, particularly *Filiocht Eireannach na Linne Seo*/*Poetry in Modern Ireland* (1951) by Austin Clarke with illustrations by Louis le Brocquy, commissioned by the Cultural Relations Committee at the Department of Foreign Affairs. The book production values, along with its mixture of art and poetry make it comparable to a Cuala Press publication. In the same year as *Poetry in Modern Ireland,* a new poetry press was established in Dublin that would re-engage with the aesthetics of book design. Dolmen drew on the ideals of Cuala by producing books for a new and increasingly modern Ireland.

**Poetry Ireland? The Dolmen Press**

Liam and Josephine Miller founded the Dolmen Press in Dublin in 1951. Miller, a draftsman in an architect's office, developed an interest in printing while working in London during the 1940s. Influenced by the London book scene, Miller returned to Dublin and purchased an Adana hand press (Harmon 24). The press had many

similarities to the Cuala Press, as Dolmen was also a cottage industry, and supplemented its income by establishing a printing division. Like the Cuala Press, Dolmen had a focus on quality; the book was not just a vessel for the text but an object in its own right. As noted by Seamus Heaney in *Stepping Stones*, the quality of the book's material composition, the heavy paper, the letterpress printing, the fabric, gave the press and its books an authority, shaping the audience's reading of the text. Through the materiality of their books, publishers could make canonical announcements. Maurice Harmon comments that Miller was a "renaissance figure" who "instinctively put quality first" (Harmon 14-17). But beyond Miller's desire for quality in book production, he also wanted the material form to shape the audience's perception of a new generation of writers and create new leading figures within Irish letters.

McGann writes in *The Textual Condition* that "a great many writers, and all poets, appreciate the symbolic and dimensions of the physical medium through which [...] the linguistic text is embodied" (McGann 56). From the beginning, Miller encoded a message through his book production that would have a significant impact on the careers of the young poets and writers he published. The tensions between the art object book and its dissemination would, however, be a factor to be overcome. One of the main distinctions between Dolmen and Cuala Press was their distribution. While Cuala books were expensive limited editions, purchased largely by antiquarian book collectors, Dolmen books had a larger distribution network and were generally affordable. The Dolmen books blurred the line between art object and trade editions.

Consequently, as Seamus Heaney notes, they made a huge impression on perceptions of Irish literature, particularly outside of the island (Heaney 50-51).

Dolmen operated in the front room of the Miller house in Dublin and, later, from their home in Co. Laois. The press's first book, published in 1951, was a book of ballads by Sigerson Clifford. Miller's architectural training had honed his skills in design. In an RTÉ Radio interview with Kevin Casey in 1976, Miller stated that his "interest in typography was not really an interest in typography, […] it was an interest in order" (Miller 25). The Dolmen books quickly established a reputation for their considered, sleek, original designs. The press's pressmark was a drawing of a megalithic dolmen. Dolmen aligned itself with the aesthetics of Cuala Press from the outset, particularly in its graphic representations of Ireland. In 1954, a limited-edition Christmas card with a striking illustration of a Neolithic dolmen by artist Louis le Brocquy was published. Miller experimented by mixing traditional craft with bold, modern designs. In the same period, the press published *The Dolmen Chapbook: An Illustrated Miscellany* and a pamphlet tilted *Ballad of Jane Shore* by Donagh MacDonagh, featuring a "hand-coloured design" by Eric Patton (Kinsella 142). *The Dolmen Chapbook* became a series of pamphlet publications featuring poems or ballads illustrated by coloured prints or woodcut prints. The pamphlets were priced at 2s. 6d. and featured a diverse range of artists and poets. The chapbooks added lustre to an establishing reputation. "An Irishman's Diary", from *The Irish Times* in June 1954, said the publications of Dolmen are fast becoming "collectors' pieces among bibliophiles" ("An Irishman's Diary: Pure Delight" 5). The comment is remarkable

considering Dolmen was only three years old and particularly in consideration of its very humble beginnings in Miller's kitchen.

In 1956, Dolmen published Thomas Kinsella's first book, *Poems.* Kinsella, a civil servant in the Department of Finance, went on to have a long association with the press, becoming its director and one of its most prominent writers. In 1958, Miller published John Montague's first collection, *Forms of Exile*. In 1954, the influential literary magazine *The Bell* ceased publication. The magazine, founded by Seán Ó Faoláin in 1940, had regularly featured the work of writers such as Elizabeth Bowen, Frank O'Connor, Patrick Kavanagh, Austin Clarke, Samuel Beckett and Louis MacNeice. Similarly, in 1958 *The Dublin Magazine* ceased publication on the death of its founder: poet Seamus O Sullivan. Earlier in the decade, the journals *Envoy*, and *Poetry Ireland* had ceased publication (McAuliffe 225). Dolmen, while still in its infancy, now became the centre for Irish poetry and publishing. Thomas Kinsella recalls the bohemian atmosphere that existed around Dolmen:

> I visited the household regularly, impressed always by the fusion of business and family activity, the scene cheerful and intense; writers, artists and professionals meeting in the small room in great numbers. (Kinsella 141)

Miller's charisma and energy fuelled a literary renaissance in Dublin. The movement was beginning to build momentum. The output of the press during this period was exceedingly impressive.

Aided by Miller, a new generation of writers began to emerge. This is most prominently seen in the 1962 anthology, *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing.* The *Miscellany,* with its vibrant red cover, featured fiction, poetry, reviews and critical essays from twelve young male contributors (see Figure 1b). Edited by John Montague and Thomas Kinsella, the majority of the writers featured had yet to be published. These new voices were all men and mostly middle-class, young professionals, like Miller. These included James Liddy, a barrister; John McGahern, a teacher; John Montague, the Paris correspondent for *The Irish Times*; Thomas Kinsella, a civil servant; Valentin Iremonger, a member of the Irish diplomatic services; and James Plunkett, a producer at Radio Eireann. Miller had entered into an agreement with Oxford University Press to co-publish Dolmen's books and the *Miscellany* was issued by Oxford in London and in New York. Sebastian Barry said that it would prove "to be a remarkable gauge to that generation" (Barry 13). Miller established a collection of major new poets in one publication. Maurice Harmon commented that Miller had a lifetime interest in Yeats (Harmon 15). Both had a grassroots understanding of the Arts and Crafts movement. Like Yeats, it is clear Miller was interested in canon-making. Unlike Yeats, however, Miller was not interested in situating himself within the tradition, but rather wished for an infrastructure for new Irish writing to emerge. The *Dolmen Miscellany of Irish*

*Writing* made an impact among readers including the newly graduated Seamus Heaney, who was still a number of years away from publishing his first book:

> I got my hands on a copy of the *Miscellany* very early on. It was a marvellous thing to behold – and to hold – the paper so heavy, the printing so obviously letterpress, the sense of respect and achievement endorsed in the actual fabric of the volume. It marked a moment. It was the right treatment for the generation who came into their own in its pages. […] it changed the game, it secured the ground, and the fact that it was published in Ireland by the Dolmen Press was, of course, important. The work it carried told readers and young writers that cultural and artistic maturity had arrived in the land for good. It also got around. (Heaney 50-51)

Critics Anne Ferry and Leah Price wrote about the community-shaping aspects of anthologies, which Heaney alludes to in *Stepping Stones* (Price 104; Ferry 127). Anthologies help to "fashion people's sense of belonging to a particular time — a generation, decade or cultural moment" (Ferry 127). Through the *Miscellany*, Heaney saw a literary culture that he wished to be part of. To Heaney, the integrity of the book material was important; it was also important that the book was published in Ireland, unlike previous publications. The large circulation of the anthology was also imperative, unlike that of Cuala Press books. The publication "secured the ground" for a new generation of Irish writers who were publishing mid-century. Heaney recognised a common culture and wanted to become part of it. Two years later, in

1964, he submitted a manuscript to Dolmen, *The Advancement of Learning.* Heaney said that there was a "cultural nationalist motive" for submitting firstly to Dolmen; Faber was a "elsewhere entirely" (Heaney 80). Miller would notoriously not accept this manuscript (Heaney 80). In 1965, London's Faber and Faber accepted Heaney's reworked manuscript and *Death of a Naturalist* appeared in 1966.

A prospectus description of the *Miscellany of Irish Writing* portrays how this generation, led by Miller, wished to be viewed:

> In recent years a new generation of writers have begun to emerge in Ireland, probably the most interesting since the realists of the 1930s. While not forming any sort of movement, they do reflect a general change in sensibility, and this Miscellany is an attempt to provide them with a platform. They are, in general, more literary than their predecessors: many of them are poets, and the prose-writers also seem to be working towards a more experimental form of story. Politics, at the moment, does not seem to be an issue, but their careful individualism suggests a close awareness of the texture of local life. (qtd. in Skelton 374)

This introductory paratext in the *Miscellany* may now seem naive considering the brewing political situation in the North, and particularly how politics would move to the centre of discourses about poetry in this decade and dominate the discussion for decades to follow. In the early to mid-1960s, however, there was a concern voiced by

many critics as to whether contemporary writing and art engaged on any level with the rapidly changing Ireland (Brown 309 1985). It was, perhaps, the calm before the storm, as the Dolmen poets would become highly politicised in later work, particularly after Bloody Sunday. In 1972, the same year as the atrocities in the Bogside in Derry, John Montague's exploration of his Ulster origins in *The Rough Field* was published. Also, in 1972, Kinsella's imprint, the Peppercanister Press was established with the publication of *Butcher's Dozen*. Peppercanister developed as a way to respond to public events, its very origins a result of a reaction against the Widgery Report on the Bloody Sunday events (Tubridy 103). Outside of the Dolmen stable, a similar shift was occurring in Irish poetry: Seamus Heaney's collection *Wintering Out,* published in 1972, debuted poems such "The Tollund Man", highlighting Heaney's anxiety with the brewing political tensions by using prehistorical metaphors as a way of framing recent sectarian violence. Derek Mahon and Michael Longley took a similar approach to Heaney, responding to the violent realities of their native place. Eavan Boland proceeded differently, openly condemning the violence committed by British forces in Ireland in her collection, *War Horse* (1975). The tragic circumstances of the brewing political situation changed the landscape of Irish poetry. Politics and poetry intersected in both form and content, in a manner not seen since the War of Independence. The response to the conflict in Northern Ireland in word and image will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Dolmen created a social infrastructure that supported poetry and literature in Ireland.[4] It also progressed the cultural landscape beyond the Literary Revival and its aftermath. John Montague acknowledges that Miller had "restored" for poets the

"possibility of having a normal career, one volume evolving from another" in Ireland (Montague 77). However, the press had weak financial prospects and did not reward some of its poets. Montague reveals in *Dolmen Press: A Celebration* that he never received royalties, not even for his most successful publication, *The Rough Field*; instead, he had an informal agreement to have as many copies as he wished of his own publications (Montague 79-80). In the same publication, Kinsella also comments on the lack of transparency in the press's finances (Kinsella 153). Maurice Harmon remarks that despite Miller's many talents, he was not a good businessman (Harmon 15). Like Cuala, the intense focus on quality and the book beautiful came at a cost.

Dolmen did, however, succeed in reinvigorating Irish poetry. Miller published the first collections of voices as diverse as Anglo-Irish Richard Murphy to working-class Michael Hartnett. The Dolmen Press was more self-assured than the Cuala Press; it did not need pages of paratext to shape the reader's understanding; its bibliographical code was explicit through the physical features of the book. Dolmen helped Irish writing to acquire a new confidence. The establishment of the Yeats Summer School (1960) and the Listowel Writer's Week (1970) also supported the growing contemporary literary scene. In 1969, new legislation introduced by the Minister for Finance Charles Haughey awarded writers and artists an exclusion to income tax (Brown 300 1985). In 1968, Haughey also announced an overhaul of the Arts Council, which led to bursaries being offered to writers in the 1970s (T. Brown 300). (As Taoiseach in 1989, Haughey became a patron of the *GBOI,* providing finance and support.) Although the Arts Council had been established in 1951, it practically ignored literature, perhaps reflecting previous governments practise of censoring

literature. One of the Dolmen's landmark publications during this period was Kinsella's translation of *The Táin* in 1969, which was illustrated by Louis le Brocquy (see figure 1c). The publication was a critical and commercial success. Brian Fallon, an *Irish Times* art critic, describing the book as a "stunner in terms of book production" (Fallon 16). He praised le Brocquy's contribution, writing that his "conception is epic, stark and primitive, at times even sinister" (Fallon 16). Le Brocquy's visual art was modern yet had the presence of the prehistoric, the visual accentuating the narrative. Writing in 2001, le Brocquy stated that his experiences on *The Táin* "remain one of the greatest adventures" of his life (le Brocquy 20).

Miller, like Yeats before him, had the extraordinary ability to shape the canon of Irish literature. Miller cultivated a culture and environment that allowed Irish poets to publish in Ireland. A lively publishing culture produced its own fruits and was self-perpetuating. [5] Miller's biggest failure was perhaps his lack of interest in publishing women poets; Eithne Strong was the only woman poet to be published by Dolmen throughout its thirty-six-year existence: a worrying observation that deserves closer study in its own right. As well as the poets he published, Miller is remembered for the aesthetically pleasing books he made and his promotion of the book as an art object.

**The Book as Art Object**

Both Cuala and Dolmen reflect a William-Morris-infused ideology of the book as an art object. For Morris, a book had to be beautiful; a work of art, as "agreeable to handle as to read" (Miller 218). He describes how "a big folio lies quiet and majestic

on the table, waiting kindly till you please to come to it, with its leaves flat and peaceful, giving you no trouble of body, so that your mind is free to enjoy the literature which its beauty enshrines" (Morris 65). In practical terms, however, the cost, the physical dimensions, and the limited print-run of Cuala and Dolmen often prevented them from being read or used like other books. Instead, the books were often purchased to be collectors' editions, to be art objects and to be displayed behind glass or on the top shelf; an object – much like the *GBOI* – created to be kept apart and fetishised. In his study of material culture in American Literature, Bill Brown writes that objects become things when they lose their original function:

> We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation (Brown 4 2001)

Brown theorises in 'thing theory' that the misuse, misappropriation, and breakage of objects forces us to confront the thing itself: "Thingness is precipitated as a kind of misuse value" (Brown 51 2015). In other words, when the book is created and presented as a piece of art, it changes how we engage with it. We can no longer read it or interreact in the same manner; its normal function is suspended. We create a

fetishistic overvaluation of the 'thing', as our consumption and interaction with it changes (Brown 51). Heaney, McGann and others have signalled the significance of the book as an art object in changing receptions to Irish literature. To Heaney, the *Dolmen Miscellany* "marked a moment", "changed the game" and "secured the ground"; the thingness of the physical dimensions of the book: "the heavy paper", "the letterpress", the sense of "respect and achievement endorsed in the fabric of the volume" created meaning for Heaney and changed how he saw Irish literary culture (Heaney 50-51). 'Thingness', the apparent strangeness of an object, strengthens the cultural nationalist motives of Dolmen and Cuala, as it made their books stand apart. Both wished to use the symbolic and signifying dimensions of their books to form a bibliographic resistance to de-Anglicise and express and define Irishness.[6] The 'thingness' of the books assisted in crafting a landscape and a future for Irish literature. Paradoxically, it also made their enterprises and Irish poetry elitist. As the twentieth century moved towards its final decades, however, and with the advancement of print technology; new poetry presses emerge that challenge the tradition laid down by Dolmen and Cuala. These new presses would re-evaluate the Irish poetry book and, in some cases, reject the book as an art object and a thing.

## The New Ireland? New Writers' Press

In 1967, a new poetry press was established with oppositional values to Cuala and Dolmen Press. The New Writers' Press was set up by Trevor Joyce and Michael and Irene Smith (Joyce 276). Joyce and the Smiths held vastly different views on book production from those of Liam Miller. The press was a reaction to the "stagnancy of

the Irish poetry scene" of the time (Joyce 276). Their opposition to the scene took two forms: firstly, in the experimental poetry they would publish, and secondly, in the material and aesthetic quality of their books. The New Writers defined themselves against Dolmen Press and rejected the idea of the book as an art object:

> Only the Dolmen Press, under Liam Miller, was publishing substantial collections in Ireland at that time, but the Dolmen was reliant on the small stable of writers it had helped establish, it still leaned heavily on the legacy of Yeats, and it favoured the book as art object rather than as a cheap, fast, and effective means of getting new poetry before its prospective public. We aimed to change that (Joyce 276).

The material of their books transmitted a social message against elitism. Their bibliographic resistance informed the design, the size, and the method of production of their books; they rejected the 'thingness' of the book as an object. Smith and Joyce used new print technologies, a photo-offset print, to produce inexpensive compact books (Joyce 278). Disavowing the art-press tradition allowed New Writers' Press to create a space for a new type of poetry. The bibliographic code of the New Writers' book transmitted a message of a new Irish poetic and a new Irish identity. The first New Writers' Press publications were *Sole Glum Trek* by Trevor Joyce (June 1967), priced at 3s 6d, and *Endsville* by Brian Lynch and Paul Durcan (August 1967), priced at 5s (Coughlan and Davis 284). These publications were the first collections for all three authors. Smith and Joyce also showed a desire in publishing poets from outside Ireland; in 1969, they published *Billy the Kid,* a collection by the San Francisco

Renaissance poet Jack Spicer and later the translated texts of César Vallejo (a Peruvian poet) and Antonio Machado (Spanish poet). Both Joyce and Smith felt that, relative to the American and European scene, the "mainstream of contemporary poetry was passing" them by (Coughlan and Davis 276). The press sought to expand its borders and move beyond the "poetry of the parish pump" (Smith 156). The internationalism of the press reflected the changes in Ireland and the receptiveness of the 1960s generation to external influences.

Alex Davis confirms this view in his book, *A Broken Line: Denis Devlin and the Irish Poetic Modernism.* Davis argues that Smith's disenchantment with Irish poetics and cultural nationalism and his championing of the 1930s modernist poets, such as Thomas MacGreevy, Brian Coffey and Denis Devlin, should be read in the context of immense "economic, social and cultural changes in Ireland during the 1960s" (Davis 129). Davis cites the emergence of the civil rights movement, the popularity of show bands, the launch of Raidió Teilifís Éireann, the growth in tourism, and the increase in "multinational capitalism", as "indices of the sea change" in Irish society during the 1960s (Davis 128). This seismic shift to modernisation, he argues, began with a change in economic policy in 1958 by Taoiseach Seán Lemass documented in the *First Program of Economic Expansion.* (Davis 128). This policy favoured multinational investment instead of de Valera's (failed) policy of agricultural growth (Davis 127-128). Davis writes that the "aesthetics" of the press "mediate" the process of modernisation in a contradictory fashion:

> Smith's polemics against cultural nationalism and his openness to the healthy influx of international modernism, an openness foreshadowed by the 1930s modernist poets, refract, on the level of poetics, Lemassion expansion economics (though not Lemass's nationalism). (Davis 128)

Smith and Joyce attempted to expand, broaden and destabilise the canon. The publication of their literary magazine made this intention evident.

In their literary magazine, *The Lace Curtain,* Michael Smith became increasingly vocal against what he saw as the insular trajectory of mainstream Irish poetry; he began to align himself with the Irish modernist poets of the 1930s (Davis 126; Joyce 280). He started a considerable correspondence with Brian Coffey in the early 1970s, and with Coffey's assistance, they discovered a number of Irish poets from the 1930s who in "project seemed in significant ways continuous with ours" (Joyce 280). New Writers' Press republished a number of these poets such as Charlie Donnelly, Thomas MacGreevy and Brian Coffey, bringing them to a new generation for the first time (Joyce 280-281). Republishing was a way of challenging the existing canon and to consolidate a past inheritance that could situate the New Writers' editorial policy and its poetry. The Dolmen Press engaged in a similar approach by republishing the poetry of Austin Clarke. Re-engaging with the past could shape the future of Irish poetry. Two camps emerged within Irish poetry. In one camp, Dolmen Press, which followed in the tradition of the bookmaking of Cuala Press and were the inheritors of the Yeatsian national tradition. On the other side, the counter-cultural, New Writers' Press, the poetics of which were experimental and looked beyond the confines of

Ireland. Both used the materials of their books to shape their bibliographic codes and both were successful in shaping poetics.

In contrast to Dolmen, however, New Writers' moment was intense and short-lived. After the 1970s, very few publications emerged; echoes of the press, however, still resonate today particularly in both Dedalus and Gallery Press. In 1985, John F. Deane established Dedalus Press. The press would follow a similar agenda to New Writers', publishing translations and having a modernist leaning, as in the publication of the *Collected Poems* of Denis Devlin. The aesthetics of the early Gallery (founded 1970) editions mimicked the style of the New Writers' Press: paperback books with wraparound sleeves. Dermot Bolger's literary and poetry press Raven Arts (1977-1992) was also influenced by New Writers' Press. Raven Arts published a variety of poets from Gerard Smyth, Michael Hartnett, Anthony Cronin, Paul Durcan, Michael O'Loughlin, Matthew Sweeney, Sara Berkeley and Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill. The design and aesthetics of New Writers', and the presses that would come after conveyed a message directing their reader to the text rather than the book itself or the "symbolic and signifying dimensions of the physical medium" (McGann 56)**.** New Writers' Press publications were a direct reaction against the art-objectivation of poetry and an intervention against the cultural nationalist aims of the other publishers. Smith and Joyce protested for the words to be the first factor for the critic, above any other element. Books were merely the vehicle for the poetry to be distributed, and not a luxury art object or a 'thing'. In 1995, the last New Writers' book was published with the apt title: *Landscapes and Silences.*[7]

**The Gallery and Salmon Presses: Modernising a Tradition**

Peter Fallon borrowed aspects from both traditions when he established Gallery Press in 1970 at the age of eighteen. Fallon felt at the time there were few avenues for unpublished Irish poets to get published in Ireland in "book form" (Fallon 550). The press-formed out of The Tara Telephone, a collective that ran from 1968 to 1971 and organised poetry readings in Dublin and published a broadsheet literary magazine series called *Capella* (McKenna 593). The teenage publisher felt that New Writers' Press and the Dolmen Press were not a "particularly receptive book publishing presence" for the unpublished poets with whom Tara Telephone had been engaged (Fallon 550). Tara Telephone catered to a new generation of would-be writers who were inspired by the spirit of the 1960s:

> Peter's energising omnipresence lit a neon torch for a generation that had had its fill of staidness and – appetite freshly whetted by *Lunch Poems* and *Howl*, by the Beat school and the Liverpool Poets – was hungry for an Irish poetry with more pizzazz, more jazz, one likelier to appeal to the metal head music fan than the egghead academic (O'Driscoll).

The first publication by Gallery was a collection called *Answers* written by Des Mahoney and Justin McCarthy; it appeared in 1970. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin was one of the most significant new voices that Fallon published during this period. Her first book, *Acts and Monuments* was published in 1972. The press also started publishing

established poets who had previously been with other publishers. The first was the poetry collection, *Bread* by Brendan Kennelly in 1971. Kennelly had previously published with Dolmen Press. Over the course of the 1970s, other established poets followed and published with Gallery: Pearse Hutchinson, Michael Hartnett, Paul Durcan and Desmond O'Grady. The press began to publish Irish language poetry – Michael Hartnett's *Adharca Broic*, which appeared in 1978 – and also Fallon's own poetry. By 1981, Gallery was referred to "as the country's leading publisher of poetry" by *Publishers Weekly,* who commented on its "highly collectable" books (McKenna 596). While the early books resembled those of New Writers' Press, over time their style changed. By the time that Liam Miller died in 1987, Gallery Press was seen by John Jordan (and others) as the successor to Dolmen Press: "with the passing of the Dolmen Press, […] Irish verse in Ireland must pass to Peter Fallon" (Jordan 44). From the outset, Fallon showed a political astuteness in convincing writers to publish with Gallery Press. He published in pamphlet form canonised Irish and Northern-Irish poets who were contractually engaged to other (usually British) publishers. Both Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon published with Gallery in this manner. Fallon showed great interest in publishing work from Northern Ireland and added Derek Mahon, Michael Longley and Medbh Mcguckian to his publishing stables, especially after the collapse of Oxford University Press's poetry list. In a letter to Northern-Irish dramatist Brian Friel on 4 July 1984, Fallon canvassed Friel to publish work with him: "I want some time, preferably soon, to elaborate my ideas about Irish authors (who are publishing with London houses) publishing in Ireland too. I think it's terribly important" (Fallon 817.13). In a short period of time and through a variety of approaches, the Gallery Press moved from a counter-culture publishing venture to become the most influential poetry publisher in Ireland; the

trajectory of Gallery is all the more extraordinary given its humble beginnings.

The visual and material qualities of books published by Gallery Press are quite distinct and have in many ways continued the tradition of the book as an art object in Ireland.[8] Working from stone buildings in Loughcrew, Meath, the press cultivated a romantically sentimental twee image of a cottage industry similar to the image portrayed by Cuala. Central to the Gallery identity is the woodcut typeset designed by the Irish artist Michael Kane in 1984; the typeset has been used on the cover of many of the books and in publicity materials. Supported by government grant aid, Fallon created a model that could commercially produce aesthetically pleasing publications that were relatively inexpensive: "The size, look, and feel of its volumes and their dual capacity to be both affordable and collectable signal, in part, the contribution of Gallery to the shaping of the Irish Book in the late twentieth century" (McKenna 592). The quality of the books, as well as their circulation, has been a defining feature of the press. Fallon crafted a distinct visual identity for his books; as Seamus Heaney remarked: "you'd still know a Gallery book at twenty paces" (Heaney 6).

The longevity of Gallery is linked to its selectivity, production values and its "obvious respect for the book as artefact, an aspect much emulated in Ireland" (Dallat 31).[9] The press borrowed bibliographic codes and practices from both Cuala and Dolmen Press. Gallery's device of a bull, for instance (resembling the Irish five pence coin) is particularly suggestive of a Cuala/Yeatsian connection. The press reinvented the tradition of books as an art object for the contemporary market within Ireland by refining Dolmen's approach and by concurrently publishing paperback and limited-

edition, hardcover books. This method catered for a wider variety of readers and book collectors: books can be 'things' and commercially saleable.[10] However, there is some evidence that the uniformity of the Gallery book encroaches on the poetry itself. In an interview with *The Irish Times*, poet Vona Groarke comments on her regret on an occasion where her lyric had to be amended to fit in the confines of a Gallery book:

> Once only do I regret taking something out: a line in my poem White Noise (from the collection *Flight*) that originally read: "between a murmur and a murmurous crowd". We ended up leaving out the adjective because it made the line too long (long lines don't suit the Gallery format, without making bits of themselves), but without that adjective, the line lags. I think it needs the tacit, in-the-wings rhyme with the word "murderous" for effect. (Groarke qtd. in Bannon)

Peter Denman has also commented that the strong identities and branding of Irish poetry presses, in particular, Gallery Press, maybe "potentially detrimental" to the text themselves: "the presses are moving centre stage – at the expense perhaps of the poets" (Denman, qtd. in McKenna 605). Smith and Joyce of New Writer's Press would certainly have agreed with these sentiments. The book as an art object or 'thing' comes at a cost. The cost articulated by Denman and Groarke is the poetry itself.

From the 1970s onwards, more literary presses emerged, making Ireland a more culturally vibrant landscape for literature, including Lilliput, Arlen House, Raven Arts, Daedalus, Salmon Poetry, O'Brien and Wolfhound. Blackstaff Press (founded in Belfast in 1971) made a considerable commitment to publishing contemporary Northern-Irish poetry. This press published Ciaran Carson, John Hewitt, Gerald Dawe and James Simmons; it also published anthologies of Northern-Irish poetry, most notably Frank Ormsby's *Poets from the North of Ireland* and Padraic Fiacc's *The Wearing of Black: An Anthology of Contemporary Ulster Poetry* (1974). These works began to draw distinctions between poetry written between the North and South of Ireland.

The most significant poetry press to launch prior to the *GBOI* was Salmon Poetry, the impact of which can be found in the *GBOI*, as many of the women poets featured in the book have been published by this press. American Jessie Lendennie founded Salmon Poetry Press in Galway 1981, publishing broadsheets before deciding to print book. The first two publications were by women poets: *Gonella* by Eva Bourke (1985) and *Goddess on the Mervue Bus* by Rita Ann Higgins (1986). Lendennie had a similar ideology to that behind the initial outputs of the Gallery Press: she felt that the mainstream of Irish poetry ignored certain writers. She wanted Salmon to give a voice to writers, who (in some but not all instances) because of their geography, class, or gender, were excluded from finding a publisher. Lendennie was particularly interested in publishing the work of women poets. She felt that women were mainly writing for their desk drawer and she wished to change this (Bourke 12). Lendennie produced slim inexpensive volumes inspired by contemporary American publishing

which resembled early Gallery and New Writers' publications. She also published the first collections of many poets including Moya Cannon and Theo Dorgan. (Dorgan would later become director of Poetry Ireland and the editor of the *GBOI.)* The publishing approach of Salmon is best articulated on its website:

> Salmon Poetry has continually taken risks. The challenge has always been in walking the tightrope between innovation and convention. The conventional approach is what makes art comfortable for people, accepted and necessary, but creative expression is not always so and not always immediately popular. [...] New work is work which is vulnerable; the greatest of artists can look back at their early work and see how far they have progressed. […] Salmon has always given focus to this concept and seen its writers flourish. (Lendennie; Salmon Poetry Website)

Salmon's commitment to take risks with new writers, and particularly new women writers, deserves to be recognised and commended. Its ideology of inclusion and openness to new voices is a radical departure from a tradition crafted by Dolmen and Cuala. The press is aligned with New Writers' in its ideology of embracing new voices and international influences. In this sense, we can see the influence of New Writers' and Salmon Press on the *GBOI* in allowing space for diversity within its milieu. The press created a space for Irish women poets to be published. A survey conducted by Cork-based poetry magazine *The Steeple,* on Irish poetry books in print up to November 1991, outlined that women writers accounted for 45% of Salmon Press books compared to sixteen per cent of Gallery Press books, five per cent of

Dedalus Press books, and eleven per cent of Raven Arts Books (Ferreira 105*)*. Another study released in 2019 by M.E.A.S, shows that Salmon are still leading the way in terms of how many women it published (Keating and McDaid 7). Salmon Poetry expanded the horizons of Irish poetry and challenged canonicity; it has now over three hundred titles in its back catalogue and continues to support new writers and established writers alike. Many of the women writers in the *GBOI* would not be included if not for Salmon, as poets had to have at least one book of poetry published in order to be invited to contribute. Salmon's contribution will be discussed in more detail in chapter three when the gendered dimensions of the *GBOI* are mapped out.

### Moving up to *The Great Book of Ireland*

The books created by small poetry presses in Ireland during the century are some of the greatest cultural achievements of the twentieth century. Enterprises such as Cuala politicised the physical materials of their books as a form of cultural resistance. The intense focus on materiality shaped the discourses of Irish poetry. Originating with Dun Emer in the early-twentieth century, which as we have seen was heavily influenced by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement, Dun Emer created a precedent in typographical, literary and bookmaking excellence that continues to influence the Irish book to the present day. Cuala radically responded to the bookmaking tradition of the eighteenth-century; with an intense focus on the integrity of the materials, the press subverted the historical beliefs in the inferior quality of the Irish book. The press politicised the bibliographic codes and materiality of their publications and in the process renegotiated the parameters the Irish book and constructions of Irish identities. Cuala was extremely radical in terms of cultural nationalism and in its promotion of

first-wave modern feminism; the press created a space for women craftsperson and artists to gain publication, commissions and employment. They also revived the Irish book at a critical time in Irish history. Similarly, Dolmen reinvigorated Irish writing from the 1950s by borrowing bibliographic codes from Cuala Press and altering it to innovate a new Irish cultural product. The books played a significant role in forming new cultural conceptions of Irish identity. As Seamus Heaney noted on receiving *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing,* the integrity of the materials endorsed a new generation and "marked a moment" and signalled artistic maturity had arrived in Ireland for good (Heaney 50- 51). Dolmen did not, however, borrow the feminist ideology of Cuala; the press only published one woman poet in its history, which contributed to a sense of a lost generation of Irish woman poets. This tendency to publish almost exclusively male writers had wider implications for Irish poetry, which continues to reverberate down to the present day as seen in the debates around the recent *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* and the M.E.A.S research.[11]

**The Great Book of Ireland: A Carnival of Influences.**

The historical continuum of Irish poetry swings between conservatism and radicalism. Cuala, New Writers' and Salmon reflect the radical element of Irish poetry, while Dolmen, the Three Candles, and Gallery reflect a more conservative aspect to production and presentation of Irish poetry. New Writers' Press's response to socio-political contexts reflected the emerging internationalism of Ireland of the 1960s and consequently expanded the discourse around Irish poetry. The press looked outside itself towards Europe and the United States, and not only rejected the insular

frameworks of Irish poetry's content, but also rejected the idea of the Irish poetry book as an art object. The *GBOI* mediates between the two camps: the editors adopted New Writers' Press's and Salmon's transnationalism along with their sense of a more expansive sense of literary tradition; they did not, however, adopt their beliefs around the book form.

The *GBOI* shows a complex infusion of influences but the most significant influence is Cuala: Elizabeth and Lilly Yeats, and the Arts and Crafts movement, a tradition in which books are art objects; a possession to be valued and admired from a distance. The *GBOI* is a 'thing', in a Brownian sense, as its end-use is obstructed; it is clearly not designed to be read by a large audience (Brown 4 2001). In the last six years, it has only been made available to the public once and even then, it was kept behind glass. The making and guarding of the *GBOI* is "symptomatic of millennial and postmillennial anxieties regarding our increasing reliance on virtual objects" (Dini 2). In the age of open access electronic books and mass production paper books; the *GBOI* stands apart because of its 'thingness'.

The creators of the *GBOI* put an extensive amount of effort in the material aspects of the book. As McGann and Mckenzie and others have said the materiality of books is charged with meaning. To borrow D.F McKenzie's summary: "the material forms of books, the non-verbal elements of the typographic notations within them, the very disposition of the space itself, have an expressive function in conveying meaning." (Mckenzie 8 1986). With the *GBOI,* the wood, goatskin, vellum, spatial qualities, calligraphy, handwriting, illustration, font and other bibliographic architectural devices, shape our reading of the text. The vellum adds significant meaning to the

text: luxurious and reminiscence of an older, artisanal tradition, it communicates that this is “immaculate vessel of cultural value” (Benedict 7). These meanings urge the reader to pay attention to the text and paradoxically also (in the case of the *GBO*I at least) distracts the reader from the text. It is however, the imagined and opposing figure of Yeats that holds the *GBOI* together. He occupies a place within the *GBOI* normally only reserved for deities. He is a revered absent presence; the polished wooden box and the wooden structure of *GBOI* tie it explicitly to the fine book production in Ireland and the Yeats siblings’ politics; specifically, their version of cultural nationalism. Made from the best Irish materials and grand in scale, the *GBOI* exists on the continuum of Irish book production informed by Morris and the Cuala Press.

The integrity of the materials seeks to endorse a new generation and mark a moment and shape the reader’s reception of them. Ironically the contents of the book do not reflect a Yeatsian sense of Irish poetry or art. As already stated, the book takes a liberal stance on who is included; it contains a wide breadth of diversity of Irish literary and visual artists. The transnational element (the inclusion of writers and artists from outside Ireland) also stands at odds with a Yeatsian view on cultural nationalism. While Cuala Press and other Revivalists enterprises wished to draw lines around Ireland, the *GBOI* wishes to move beyond set definitions by offering an expansive representation of life on the island of Ireland. It offers an immiscible mixture, to many, by utilising a traditional form, charged with meaning, to communicate a new expression of Irish art and Irishness.

In other ways too, the book defies convention. The *GBOI* is not a typical anthology. Benedict's summary that "anthologies represent high literature for a mass audience", does not apply to the *GBOI* (Benedict 29). Unlike other Irish anthologies, such as *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* and the more recent *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (2010), the *GBOI* was not created to be widely circulated. Therefore, the *GBOI's* "social values" of inclusion and transnationalism do not travel far. The material politics of the *GBOI* act against its social values, which is a problematic aspect of the book. If the book cannot be read or is only viewed from behind glass, then the literary values and social values it embodies are never transmitted. In its present form, the book can never form part of the wider culture. All its intended meaning remains concealed within a wooden box. This makes the *GBOI* distinct as a book and as an Irish anthology.

Similarly, the spatial arrangements of the *GBOI* do not correspond to a typical modern anthology. Anne Ferry writes that "Selection and arrangement are the broadest signals of the anthologist's role"; the anthologist generally decides the "spatial design" of how the poem will be arranged on the page: its position, font and illustration (Ferry 39-68). In the *GBOI*, the editors gave control of large aspects of the spatial design to the poets and artists. For the most part, the poets wrote their poem in their handwriting; some poets such as Paul Muldoon in Folio 130 wrote in large writing, while others such as Mary Dorcey, in Folio 12, placed her stanzas on opposite ends of the folio and wrote in small writing. The point is that the poets, themselves, could decide on how they wished their texts to look. Similarly, the visual artists had the autonomy to decide the spatial design of their folio. Their only constraints were the material they were working on and the addition of the poet's and

calligrapher's work. It is clear that Dorgan and Lambert had a lesser role than other anthologists; while they did choose the contributors, they also did not dictate what poem or image they would inscribe. Generally, "the anthologist as the author of the book supplants the author of the poem in choosing how it should be presented, with interpretive consequences" that can give a "different direction to the experience of the poem than if it was read elsewhere", however, this is not the case with the *GBOI* (Ferry 2). With the *GBOI*, the writer and artist assumed authority and Dorgan and Lambert took a lesser role than the usual anthologist. This gives the prospective reader of the *GBOI* an altogether different experience, as it is the presence of the artist, their handwriting, brushstroke, and signature, which shapes the reading of the folio.

Reading the *GBOI* is a different experience to reading a printed anthology, as there is a sense of a physical presence of poet and artist encoded on the page in their artistic works, but also the sense that they left their DNA on the folios. Milton's comment, with which this chapter began, that "books are not absolutely dead things" but have a "life beyond life" takes on new significance when considering the *GBOI* (Milton qtd in Nicolas 2). Beckett's folio on Folio 53 is the best example of this as there is a strong sense of the presence of the poet on the page. Le Brocquy's painting depicting Beckett's ghostlike face peering up to the reader adds to this effect and creates the feeling of a consecrated space.

Another way in which the *GBOI* does not correspond to typical anthologies is word-image relations. In the *GBOI* the dominance of the illustration is a defining feature. Each of the 137 folios contains some form of illustration, which is not typical of

modern anthologies. While illustrations in other anthologies "prompt sentimental responses to the reading" (Benedict 13), in the *GBOI*, the image does not always correspond to the text, the artist has autonomy in how to respond to the poem, resulting in a decontextualising effect. In other words, the image's purpose is not to add to the text – although in some cases, such as Folio 53, the illustration does contribute to the textual. There are many examples in the text (Folio 123 and Folio 40, for instance) where the image does not correspond to the text in any fashion. This word-image relationship is one of the most distinct aspects to the *GBOI*; each artist decides for him/herself if they will follow tradition or resist it; this is discussed further in the next chapter. All in all, the *GBOI* defies several conventions about anthologies.

In other ways, it corresponds to the genre. Benedict, Ferry, and Joseph Csicsila all identity a key feature of the anthology is its diversity (Benedict 10; Ferry 2-6; Csicsila 20-23). Through the metaphors of "plenitudes, diversity and feasting" anthologies applaud the culture from which they originated and urge readers to consume it (Benedict 10-11). The diversity of the *GBOI* is its defining feature, besides its material identity. Other metaphors are just as applicable: Benedict's description of anthologies as "literary carnivals" a vessel to accommodate disparate elements is particularly apt for the *GBOI.* Similarly, Vicesimus Knox's much-quoted preface to *Other Men's Flowers: An Anthology of Poetry* could also be suitably applied to *GBOI*: "I have only made a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the thread that ties them together" (Knox). With 137 unique 'flowers', the *GBOI* is a feast for the senses; a site of diversity and a carnival of late-twentieth-century Irish culture threaded and held together using the best of Irish

materials. Its existence reveals an almost Yeatsian cyclical conception of history and politics.

The next chapter discusses a significant element of the *GBOI*; a recurrent tension between Irish image and text that regenerates on the folios of the book.

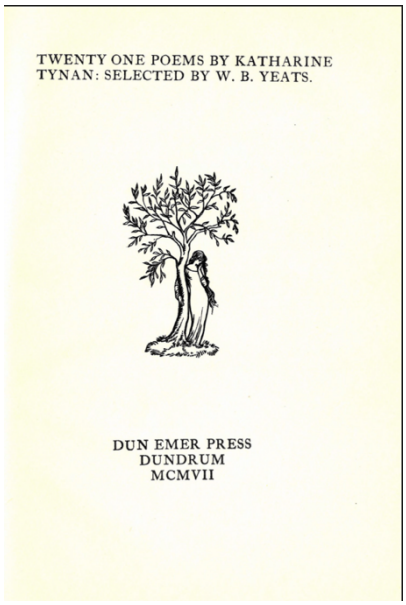



Figure 1a

Dun Emer Pressmark: Lady Emer designed by Elinor Monsell. First appeared in Katharine Tynan's *Twenty One Poems* in Dublin in 1907.

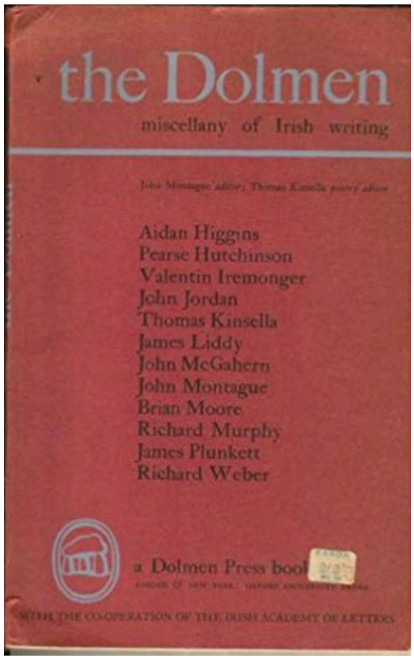



Figure 1b

*Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing*. Published by Dolmen in 1962. Edited by Thomas Kinsella and John Montague

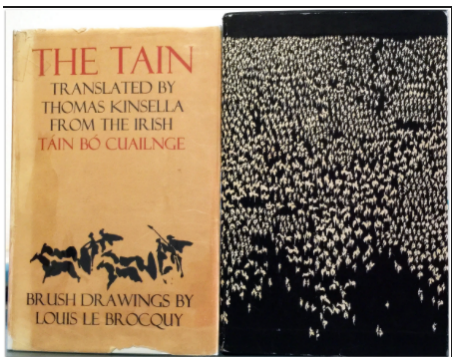



Figure 1c

*The Táin.* Published by Dolmen in 1969. Translated from the Irish by Thomas Kinsella. Illustrated by Louis le Brocquy.




Figure 1d

*The Great Book of Ireland's goatskin cover and title page.*

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

CORA
Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Lawlor, J. 2020. A cultural history of The Great Book of Ireland – Leabhar Mór na hÉireann. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.

Please note that Chapters 2, 3 & 4 (pp. 92-241) are unavailable due to a restriction requested by the author.

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# Conclusion

> The wide social audiences more explicitly drawn into anthologies as distinct from the other books of poetry, along with the anthology reader's awareness of the company of other readers —past, present, or to come — have the effect of making all entries in anthologies seem in some more special sense than other printed poems to be public, like works of art displayed in a museum. (Ferry 127)

This thesis places and gives context to a complex and unique Irish cultural artefact whose existence is not well-known and whose significance is not sufficiently recognised within the field of Irish Studies. Though unique, the *GBOI* is not a cultural anomaly. The ideological framework of the *GBOI* is informed by late twentieth-century internationalism, ideas of globalisation, of crossing borders and infinite interchange of signs/multiplicity, and the pluralisation of meaning, all of which locate the book in its own time and place. The *GBOI* is public in the sense described by Ferry above, in that it was created not to be read like a regular book but to be an object to be appraised and fetishised (Ferry 127). President Michael D. Higgins has correctly described it as a book with a "kaleidoscopic" vision of Irishness, reflecting a "contemporary world that was falling from a version of modernism into a period of consumption and a postmodern flux" (Higgins). The book offers a distinctive reflection of the period, with 273 co-creators depicting a layered snapshot of Irish society in the closing decade of the turbulent twentieth century. It shows fascinating but opposing exchanges and representations of Ireland and Irishness; the old is mixed with the new to produce a hybrid vision of Ireland showing the variety of influences that informed Irish cultural production. Various versions of Ireland contest each other within the book: the national and the transnational, the North and the South, the urban and rural representations along with gendered expressions of Irishness. Across word and image

the *GBOI* highlights in an extraordinary way, the breadth of diversity present within Ireland during this period.

### A Cultural Muddle

The multiple themes and contributors in the *GBOI* can also, however, convey conflict and disharmony. On the first encounter with the *GBOI*, one is generally captivated by the tome's impressive material presence consisting of the white swirling goatskin pelt, the binding, the diversity of the handwriting and images, the vellum, and the beautiful polished Yeatisan wooden box and its great size. On closer inspection, however, the book's enchanting clarity seems to diminish; the multitude and variance of text and images, even on the same folio can perplex the reader, as it can be difficult to decipher what the *GBOI* is exactly attempting to present. The folios display opposing, and at times, incongruous elements which, in the words of one of its editors was aimed to be "wilful and contradictory, capricious, inspired and sometimes desperate" (Dorgan 3). The cultural tensions and inherent contradictions, particularly its foremost conflicting creative tension between the formalist medievalist structure of the book and the content informed by internationalism and multiplicity; create a muddle. Even on the same folios of the *GBOI* conflict and contradictions abound; as each contributor was afforded the freedom to respond or not respond to the previous inscription, with the result that the book can feel congested and over-crowded with contributors all contesting each other for territory. This creative chaos was partly a matter of design.

Dorgan and Lambert's views of the *GBOI* as a subversive pronouncement on tradition are telling (Tynan 3: Dorgan ii). The editors saw the potential of the project to undermine the power structures inherent within Irish culture; especially between the visual and the textual.

In the *GBOI,* the visual elements are given identical autonomy as the textual; they "decided from the start that image and poem would have equal status" (Dorgan 2013). Tensions resulted, deriving from the traditional dominance of literature within Irish culture. Artists such as Michael Mulcahy and Jane O'Malley took control of their respective folios, leaving little space for texts. These folios show an ancient power struggle where the images are at times arguing with the text and sometimes the word responds (Camille 22). The *GBOI* draws attention to these entrenched historical divisions and brings them to light in a contemporary context.

In other ways, the book undermines established power structures. Within the *GBOI*, there is a subversive relinquishing of authority*;* while in other anthologies, the editor would generally have control over the spatial arrangements and the selection of illustration and poem, this is not the case with the *GBOI*. With this book, the poets and artists were given agency over their page; for instance, a poet could select a poem of their choosing and inscribe it in whatever way the s/he saw fit. This process removed the need for a typesetter, printer and other middlemen involved in modern book production. The *GBOI* gives authority to its contributors which undermines the social conventions of the anthology genre. Ferry's comment that the "anthologist as author of the book supplants the author of the poem in choosing how it should be presented" does not apply in full to the *GBOI* (Ferry 2). In the *GBOI*'s case, the editors deferred their power to the contributors of the folios but kept control over some aspects of the book design, such as its physical structure and general presentation of the book. Dorgan's and Lambert's approach highlights concealed aspects of the literary tradition. By giving agency to the poets and writers, they draw attention to the power of the anthologists and editors within the tradition: persons who act as gatekeepers and ultimately have control of how the text and illustration is presented within the book.

Irish women poets within the *GBOI* took the opportunity, made available to them, to show their resistance to the male-dominated tradition. As discussed in chapter three, Meehan, Boland, Dorcey, Higgins and others depicted an alternative version of Irish womanhood in the *GBOI* which challenges the traditional benign representations of the self-sacrificing Irish womanhood in Irish literature. These contributors were allowed the space within the *GBOI* to write about women's experiences from a woman's perspective.

The editors of the *GBOI* created a liberal space where rules could be broken, power shared, gatekeepers bypassed, and new conventions established. While the *GBOI* broke many conventions of the anthology it conformed to other aspects of the genre. Ferry writes that "anthologists during the first third of the twentieth century played a direct part in re-ordering the centuries-old hierarchy" (Ferry 122). This claim could be applied to Dorgan and Lambert; as they were interested in attempting to undermine and reordering hierarchy systems within some elements of the cultural spheres. Dorgan and Lambert sought to reorder established precedents within the tradition by sharing power amongst the contributors and removing their own power. This calculated cultural experiment resulted in a sense of lawlessness within the project. The book is, in a sense, a counter-culture object, as it resists some of the established precedents of Irish cultural production. The book's subversiveness further complicates the narrative of the book and prevents a quick review. It acts as a barrier to research and discourse. To-date, the research undertaken on the *GBOI* focuses on either the genesis or its material aspects and not on its subversive themes.

To-date, the research on the *GBOI* has been underwhelming. Apart from Feldman's reading of Folio 53 (le Brocquy and Beckett), no researcher has performed a close reading of

individual folios or attempted to comparatively discuss the folios. This lack of engagement has stifled the recognition of the book within the wider culture. This thesis has shown that there is an enormous value to reading individual folios of the *GBOI* closely, not only for the insights that are thereby uncovered but also they allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the grand narratives of the book to emerge.

For instance, Feldman's helpful description of Folio 53 as "a literary tombstone" could, in fact, be applied to the whole book (Feldman 1). The *GBOI* is a tombstone to a generation of writers and artists, in that it captures a sense of their living presence within the structures of a book. Like a tombstone, the *GBOI* is dated and all capture a moment in time. The book is also a monument or a tombstone for a version of Ireland as it captures a vestige of Irish existence, and a fleeting snapshot of lives and a society in flux in the last decade of an extraordinary century. The disharmonious elements of the book and its appetite to resist established patterns reflect the dramatic changes that were unfolding within Irish society as Ireland grappled with tradition, modernity, and emerging globalisation. Ireland's naivety in its embracement of globalisation as a solution to its social problems is revealed in the book. Conflicted and complex, the *GBOI* directly addressed aspects of the divided present.

### The *GBOI*'s Legacy

Due to lack of research, the *GBOI* is, however, largely unknown, despite it being the most expensive book sold in Ireland and one of the most expensive books in the world. Dorgan and Lambert's vision to create a multivalent liberal space was met with critical ambivalence. In the eyes of some commentators, it "stood for everything and nothing" at the same time. The book has not been appreciated in its own time and continues to occupy

a space beyond the public realm, distant and almost unknown, even within the field of Irish Studies. The form, density and mixture of the content of the book ensured that the *GBOI* has not generated a lack of meaningful critical discourse**.** It is seen as a private museum piece, separated from the wider culture. It has not become the public artefact it was envisioned to be. The limited circulation and the book's physical form makes the project elitist – while its contents communicate a non-elitist message of inclusivity. The tension and contradiction between elitism and inclusivity is one of the reasons why the book is unknown and not part of contemporary visual and literary discourses. Where it is known, the book can provoke unusual responses. For instance, at a conference an audience member dismissed the book and this thesis with a sweeping gesture, saying the book "is not culture, it is simply painting by numbers!", while another audience member questioned the private circulation of the manuscript to the selected contributors.

In the creative community, the influence of the *GBOI* has been more substantial and more positive: Paul Muldoon's "Incantata", Matthew Sweeney's poem "Petition to Saint Anthony", Eamonn O'Doherty's Armoured Pram and *An Leabhair Mór: The Great Book of Gaelic,* which brought Scottish and Irish artists and poets together, are all directly inspired by *GBOI*. Similarly, the poetry anthology *New Eyes on the Great Book,* published by University College Cork library and Munster Writer's Centre in 2014, showed how a new generation of Cork-based poets respond to the *GBOI*. While critically the book has been ignored, the influence of the book continues to inspire creative projects and events in seen and unseen ways, almost thirty years since it was completed. The reception of the *GBOI*, as highlighted in this research, show that the *GBOI* has a role to play in shaping debates and narratives around Irish identity, in the tradition of making books, multidisciplinary collaboration, anthologising and the role and patronage of art in Ireland.

The *GBOI* challenges the notion that twentieth-century Irish art and writing or, indeed, lived experience, was homogeneous. It would be true to state that the legacy and discourses around the *GBOI* are still evolving. To borrow Margaret Kelleher's phraseology, the *GBOI's* "future-shaping significance" is still not known (Kelleher 89). Its future will depend on the availability and visibility of the book to numerous types of readership.

The *GBOI*'s permanent custodian, University College Cork, has the institutional resources to stimulate interest in this artefact and increase its hitherto limited readership. While final plans of the *GBOI* have yet to fully unfold, it would be a logical first step in disseminating the electronic version of the book freely. It would potentially attract many scholars and members of the literary community wanting to see their favourite writer's handwriting and the possibility to zoom-in and discover the poetry, the marginalia and other textual elements. At the present moment, the digital copy of the book is not available to the public or the University community: it has only been displayed for a limited amount of time in 2014 beside the physical book in the Glucksman Gallery. Due to issues around conservation, displaying the physical book is more arduous and no public plan exists presently to have the book put on permanent display. Currently, the *GBOI* is being stored in its box in a temperature-controlled repository in the basement of Boole Library and is generally not available to researchers or members of the public. It is hoped that the future will see an intervention from University College Cork to open research on the *GBOI,* which will lead to more critical readings, that will potentially tease out the multiple and complex narratives of the book. To-date, however, University College Cork has not sufficiently promoted the book or made it available to the scholarly or wider community. If this present approach continues, it will mean that the *GBOI* will never form part of the wider culture:

its social and literary values will never be transmitted, and the enterprise will have been a lot of effort for little or no outcomes.

University College Cork could replicate the proven model utilised by Trinity College Dublin in its public display of the *Book of Kells* to make the *GBOI* freely available to mainstream society. The book could be given its own permanent exhibition in the University's Boole Library and resources provided to hire a public engagement officer, who would oversee the exhibition and deliver workshops to school children and members of the community. University College Cork could also replicate the newly opened Museum of Literature Ireland and create an interactive immersive multi-media exhibit for the *GBOI* which would tell the book's story in an innovative and creative way. Over time, the book could potentially form part of the city's identity and become one of the treasures of Cork and of the University. For this to happen, it must be made available to the public and not be concealed away in a locked basement

**The *GBOI*: Telling A New Story**

The purchase of the book on behalf of University College Cork in 2013, can be read as part of a movement to utilise the power of the arts during the identity-shaken post-Celtic Tiger period. President Michael D. Higgins' *Glaoch – The President's Call* (2013), the Royal Irish Academy's multi-volume edition on *Art and Architecture of Ireland I-V* (2014), and Fintan O'Toole's *A History of Ireland in 100 Objects* (2013) are all part of a public discourse that sought to draw inspiration from Ireland's culture in order to reinvigorate and reconfigure a sense of national identity. One of the attractive qualities of the *GBOI* is that it tells a new story about Ireland and Irishness: it creates its own paradigm of Irishness that

is expansive, contradictory and open-ended. At the first launch of the book in 1991, the then Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey astutely commented that the *GBOI* "would help our descendants understand our time in much the same way as we gain an understanding of our ancestors from ancient books and manuscripts" (Tynan 3). Purchased in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic economic crash, UCC could position and frame the *GBOI* as one of the most significant cultural objects to emerge from the immediate pre-Celtic Tiger period.

As the first comprehensive study of the *GBOI,* this thesis will also serve as a catalyst for further study and research on a book that is rich in material and metaphorical meaning. This research has shed light on the cultural, social and indeed historical significance of the *GBOI*, as an artefact that seeks to anthologise and shape the multiplicity of Irish identities and experiences at the end of the twentieth century. It has also mapped the book's lineage as belonging to the Irish Arts and Crafts movement. If at the beginning of the twentieth century, Cuala Press employed the aesthetics and politics of bookmaking to further the aims of cultural nationalism and to influence the debates around the politics of Irish identity, at the latter end of the century the *GBOI* employed similar methods to expand the parameters of Irish identity through transnationalism and an ideology of openness. The *GBOI* contains a multi-layered texture of ideological commitments that challenge prevailing notions of Irishness and insularity. The idea, process, and artefact presented a narrative of change and offered a new image of an open, outward-looking, and changing island. In contrast to the other important books produced in Ireland, the *GBOI* reflects the growing cultural liberalism of the period. In a creative and an emblematic manner, the *GBOI* documents and tells a story of the immense societal changes to occur in Ireland.

The transnational element of the *GBOI* was perhaps the clearest indication of the change occurring in Ireland. The inclusion of writers and artists from outside the island of Ireland corresponds with social and historical contexts pertaining to the dissolution of national boundaries across Europe at this time. The multiplicity of identities expressed within the *GBOI*, and indeed the inclusion of outsider voices intersects with a traditionally constraining view/narrative of Irishness that excludes otherness. Through its paradigm of inclusion, the *GBOI* attempts to tell a type of new narrative about Ireland; by illustrating the elasticity of Irish identity which challenges the idea of a homogenous Irish society. It projects but also reflects a new Irish vision of inclusion and equity. One hundred years after it was first posed in *Ulysses,* the Citizen's question to Bloom: "What is your Nation" is answered anew on the pages of the *GBOI*. Despite the book's solid size and weight, the answers remain provisional.

[1] The *GBOI* and its wooden box have a combined mass of 18.335 kg.

[2] Read and O'Connor had perhaps been influenced by the *Cabinet's* processor *The Spirit of the Nation* (1843-).

[3] Anne Ferry comments that the poet as anthology-maker proliferated in the twentieth century in England and the USA (Ferry 5).

[4] Another success of the Dolmen press was its revival of Austin Clarke's body of work with the publication of *Later Poems* in 1961. Maunsel originally published Clarke, but after it disbanded in 1926, Clarke had to look towards London for publication. George Allen and Unwin, a London-based publisher, released his *Collected Poems* in 1936. With growing uncertainty, Clarke decided to start his own enterprise. The Bridge Press, which was not a fully functioning press but a self-publishing venture, a point Clarke's son is very keen to point out in the 1996 publication *Austin Clarke: Remembered* (Clarke 7). Miller was able to canonise the elder poet's work by reprinting Clarke's past catalogue and new collections. Miller also published Clarke's *Collected Plays* in 1963 and *Collected Poems* in 1974, as well as *A Tribute To Austin Clarke on His Seventieth Birthday.* At Miller's burial in 1987, Kinsella stated that "restoring dignity to the career of Austin Clarke" was one of Miller's finest acts (Kinsella 153).

[5] Three poets published by Dolmen Press went on to edit significant anthologies of Irish poetry; in 1970, Brendan Kennelly edited *The Penguin Book of Irish Verse*, John Montague edited *The Faber Book of Irish Verse* in 1974, and Thomas Kinsella edited the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* in 1986. All three publications are seen as foundational texts in modern Irish poetry.

[6] Paradoxically, much like Kelmscott Press, creating beautiful and expensive books was essentially an elitist preoccupation which created substantial barriers to their potential readership. Limited edition meant in many cases; a limited audience and readership.

[7] In 2012, Shearsman Books in the UK published David Lloyd's *Arc and Sill* under the dual imprint of Shearsman/New Writers' Press – this was at the request of the author and does not indicate any real input from NWP beyond the use of its name. It is also worth noting SoundEye Press, which might be seen as a descendent of NWP. Tevor Joyce is involved with it, although Fergal Gaynor is the principal publisher.

[8] For Peter Fallon the design of the book is a primary concern: "Some writers have little sense of visual art and few ideas about what image might work on a cover. This is something that interests me greatly, the whole look of a book, the enhanced pleasure you might accord to the contents." (Fallon qtd. in Bannon)

[9] There is a prestige with publishing with Gallery and the academy take notes of its writers. Like Liam Miller before him, Peter Fallon wields a considerable amount of cultural influence within the poetry milieu in Ireland. Fallon has edited *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* along with Derek Mahon, and founded Deerfield, a handcrafted poetry press in the United States. Approaching its fiftieth year and with over 400 books in its stable, Gallery under the stewardship of Fallon remains one of the most important cultural establishment in Ireland.

[10] The uniform format and size of Gallery books also keep costs reduced.

[11]When the Gerald Dawe edited book of essays *Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* was published earlier in 2018, it was criticized heavily for once again failing to properly take account of women's contribution to the Irish poetic canon. A collection of writers, critics and academics formed a collective

called *FIRED! Irish Women Poets and the Canon*, which offers a pledge to redress gender imbalance in Irish poetry

[12]Heaney, Durcan, Kennelly, Rosenstock, Aidan and Richard Murphy also inscribed two poems in the *GBOI.*

[13]The disparity between genders is less with visual artists in the *GBOI*, as there are 31 women and 90 male visual artists, which equates to 25% women versus 75% male

[14]In 1932 the Irish government introduced the Marriage Bar requiring women to leave paid employment on marriage. The marriage bar was lifted in 1957 for primary teachers but remained in place for civil servants until 1973.

[15] Patrick Crotty's *The Penguin Book of Irish Poetry* (2010) included more women poets than previous anthologies.

[16]The *GBOI* was first completed and exhibited in 1991. Between 1991 and 1993 numerous other folios were added.

[17] The other art forms in the *GBOI* reveals similar trends to poetry. In visual arts, there are thirty one women contributors in *GBOI* (25.61%), compared to ninety artists who are men (74.38%). In the music composition element, there are seven male contributors (77.77%) and two women contributors (22.22%).

[18]Lucy Collins has commented that "Boland's interrogation of the position of the woman poet in Ireland has highlighted the important omissions in terms of critical inclusiveness, yet has in large measure perpetuated the notion that few women of significance published poetry prior to the late twentieth century"(Collins 2).

[19]In her inaugural address on the 3rd of December 1990 in Dublin Castle, Mary Robinson quoted from Boland's poetry: "As a woman, I want women who have felt themselves outside history to be written back into history, in the words of Eavan Boland, 'Finding a voice where they found a vision'" (Robinson). In her autobiography *Everybody Matters,* Robinson writes that she wanted her inaugural speech to be a foundational text for a new "open, tolerant, inclusive" Ireland: "I wanted to capture the idea of an Ireland that was opening up" (Robinson 147).

[20] A significant amount of these feminist recovery projects only happened after Boland wrote a *A Kind of Scar* in 1989.

[21] Meehan says that she had the "sense" that her "own poetic was bound up with inscribing into her work the voices of the people in the city", women who had difficult lives who "didn't seem to get much of a look in anywhere; "people from the poorer areas, from the flat complexes, people who were burying their children in the heroin epidemics (Meehan 246-247).

[22] It is worth noting that Folio 7 has a special significance for both Theo Dorgan and Paula Meehan, as they first met at the inscription of the page and they have been partners since that period (Dorgan 2014).

[23]On the 25th May 2018, a referendum was passed to repeal the Eighth Amendment which would legally allow abortion in Ireland under certain conditions.

[24]Sheela na Gig are ancient stone carvings of representations of a woman in an act of display showing an exaggerated genitalia. The meaning of the carvings – whether a fertility symbol or an ancient way decoration – is still in dispute.

[25] Rita Ann Higgins poem "The KKK of Kastle Park" written about a residents' group clash with the travelling community caused controversy and a legal case against the poet in 2001.

[26]There is marked difference in how men and women represent the female gender in Irish poetry. See for instance Patricia Coughlan's ''Bog Queens': The Representation of Women in the Poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney", where she writes that the representations of women in Irish poetry authored by men mostly takes "the form of dualistically opposed aspects: beloved or spouse figures verses mother figures, which are in turn benign and fertile or awe-inspiring and terrible" (Coughlan 41-42). Coughlan describes the work of both Heaney and Montague as "damagingly gendered" and "reliant old, familiar and familiarly oppressive allocations of gender positions" (Coughlan 41-59). The male is presented as a dominant figure "who explores, describes, brings to pleasure and compassionates a passive feminine one" (Coughlan 51). In the essay, Coughlan pays particular focus on Heaney's bog poems and in particular "Punishment", the poem Heaney inscribed in the *GBOI*. She writes that Heaney's poem "Digging" foreshadows his "explicit sexual" bog poems with its self-assured masculinity and "all too relevant succession of phallic surrogates pen, 'snug as a gun'" (Coughlan 51). Coughlan concludes that every feat of self-discovery by these male masculine poets entails the defeat of a feminine ego" (Coughlan 59).

[27]Paintings of naked or partly naked women also appear in Folio 7, 40, 41, 45, 46, 60, 71, 88,92, 100, 113, and 117.Paintings of naked or partly naked men appear in 32, 41, 45, 63, 67, 69, 71, 72, 113 and 117.

[28]Mary Dorcey published her first collection of poems *Kindling* outside of Ireland with the London-based feminist press Onlywomen Press; while her second collection *Moving into the Space Cleared by Our Mothers* was published in Ireland by Salmon Poetry in 1991.

[29]English Translation of poem from *Motherhood in Ireland, Creation and Context.* Mercier Press, 2004.

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**– Item 1**

**Interview Between Theo Dorgan and James Lawlor**

**Q1-One of the most fascinating aspects of the *GBOI* is that it seems to want to expands the parameters of what Ireland could be represented as. I am interested to know if this was a founding ideology behind the *GBOI ?***

I'm not sure that there was anything as coherent as a 'founding ideology' animating our discussions or intentions when we set out to make the *GB*. The initial impulse was very simple, inasmuch as Gene and I began by wanting to make a book that included accomplished poets and painters — people who were good at what they do. Of course that impulse was very quickly folded into what became a complex and engrossing conversation about, in essence, choice and representation. The first cohort of contributors more or less suggested themselves — artists and poets who had already gained what you might call agreed reputations. Senior figures, if you like, veterans in their craft and work. As it became clear to us that we were embarked on what might become, in some modest way, a document with some projected historical weight and importance, we began to ask ourselves (and to ask each other) questions about who should be included. As you know, we agreed from the outset that Gene would choose the artists and I would choose the poets. This 'ideal' balance quickly became complicated by the simple fact that I knew far more about the visual arts, at the time, than Gene did about poetry, with the inevitable result that I often found myself

suggesting artists for inclusion, with Gene occasionally suggesting poets. By and large, and I hope my recollection is accurate here, we left it to each other to make the final decisions. (I should note here that there are omissions among the artists that I regret to this day).

You have to keep constantly in mind that we were making all this up as we went along, and of course as contributors became involved, we often had the benefit of their suggestions for inclusions also. So, an evolving conversation. As far as ideology goes, Gene and I, and Eamonn Martin, too, shared a common position that we would make maximum efforts to see that women writers and artists were fairly and properly represented, while I was also determined to ensure a maximal presence for poets in the Irish language — not that there was any resistance to this. I'd like it to be clear that these central tenets, that women and Irish language artists should be properly represented seems to both Gene and I such an obvious thing that we never had to make a decision about it — it was more a matter of discovering as we went along that each of us was proposing women artists and writers as an obvious matter of course, and it was equally obvious to us that the Irish language was integral to the practice of poetry on the island.

When I say that we made maximum efforts to ensure these presences, this is because at that time it was easier than it is now for women to be missing from commentary and from critical discourse — from the canon-making process, so to speak — and we were constantly checking with ourselves, if I might put it like this, to ensure that good artists who were women had not slipped into some kind of temporary obscurity. I should like

to put it on record, and here is as good a place as any, that when we asked contributors to recommend possible future contributors, the artists and poets were as likely to suggest women colleagues as they were to suggest men. When it came to summarising the *GBOI* as an ongoing project, to funders, to media insofar as they were interested, and to potential contributors, we did tend to convert what seems to us an obvious practice into an ideological proposition, that is to say to use the process and to project the *GBOI* to make the point that in the community of writers and artists, the rights of women to recognition and participation were both central and non-negotiable. Insofar as we adopted an ideological position vis a vis the Irish language, it would be fair to say that we consider Irish poetry to be a single poetry conducted in two languages. This is of course a simplification of the relationship between a given language and its specific cultural matrix, but we were always keen to project and reinforce the collegiality of the relationship between poets working in these two languages.

The question of separate jurisdictions never arose for us; we did not differentiate between Irish artists from the Republic and Irish artists from Northern Ireland when it came to proposing or selecting contributors. This was in part an unreflective position — Poetry Ireland at the time received about 25% of its grant aid from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, poets from north and south had always been include in anthologies of Irish poetry, northern and southern artists were in the habit of studying in, working in and exhibiting in both jurisdictions indiscriminately. Simply put, there was no Border in the arts on the island of Ireland.

There may also have been an unconscious inscription in tradition involved here — we were engaged in making an illuminated manuscript, and the historical precedents dated back to an epoch when the designation 'Ireland' referred unremarkably to an undifferentiated territory.

Set against this was the understanding that both Gene and I shared, that the contemporary Irish poet or artist is as likely to have been influenced in his or her development by non-Irish as by indigenous sources. Cathal Ó Searcaigh, for instance, acknowledges Jack Kerouac as a formative influence, one can trace the influence of the Fauves in the work of Michael Kane, and so on. In other words, Irish artists and poets in our time are effortlessly inscribed in traditions that are as much marked by elective affinity as by inescapable or obvious domestic influences. Based on this understanding we chose to include in the *GBOI* poets, especially, who were habitual or adventitious visitors to Ireland at the time we were making the book, and hence were inscribed, however temporarily, in the ongoing process of making art on the island which, in part, we were trying to capture.

We never had any intention of presenting the *GBOI*, if we ever managed to finish it, as some kind of definitive statement, some summary of 'the best' poetry and art being made on the island at the close of the 20th century. We were conscious of our own limitations at all times, determined not to let our own taste and understanding be represented as in some way qualifying us to make canonical pronouncements. We tried as best we could, not least by soliciting opinions and recommendations from contributors as they were added, to make of the GB a statement of who and what we

were at the time of making, as reflected and embodied in the images and texts we were collecting.

You could say that the cumulative force of the *GBOI* as it took shape contained a set of ideological propositions: that we had become, and properly, a heterogenous population on the island of Ireland, that our artists and poets drew the authority of antecedence from a complex variety of traditions and exemplars, that the contributors saw themselves, and hence our island, in the light of a confident internationalism, that the editors and contributors shared a common belief in the absolute right of women to be respected, included and valued as poets and artists; we believed in heterodoxy, and made space for it; we believed in the rights of so-called minority languages, we believed that a true and accurate mirror held up to our times had to be multivalent, had to celebrate and project differences in style and substance, had to pose questions as much as propose answers or make room for statements.

If the *GBOI* is a sign made in the name of a tradition, which of course, as an illuminated manuscript it is, then it is also a deliberate, collective and assertive subversion of that tradition, a championing of the heterodox in the line of succession from ancestral texts that were, for all their beauty, shaped and intended as instruments of a campaigning orthodoxy.

## Appendix – Item 2

### Interview between Lorcan Walshe (Contributor to Folio 43) and James Lawlor.

**-What are your memories of your involvement in the *Great Book of Ireland*?**

When Gene Lambert phoned to ask me to contribute, he could not tell me whose poem would be part of the page I was to work on. He later called to my studio with the vellum page on which Eavan Boland's poem was already written. "The Achill Woman" was a poem with which I was already familiar and I was surprised that Eavan Boland had not been paired with a female artist, such as Camille Souter or Alice Hanratty - a combination which might symbolise the authority of women poets and painters in 20th Century Ireland.

There was a short time frame for completion of the piece, which Gene collected from my studio a few weeks later. Eavan Boland appeared in a RTE news broadcast at the original launch of the *Great Book*. The poet was filmed observing her poem on a page which she described as 'illustrated by an artist'. I remember thinking 'she has probably just seen the page and has no idea of who the artist is, or what the artist was hoping to convey' and I wondered if active collaboration might have resulted in a more sophisticated endeavour.

After the original launch the folio of Eavan Boland's poem and my painting was reproduced, along with three others, in the *Irish Times* and later a detail of the painting

was used as a cover image for an anthology of Irish poetry. And now this folio attracts your attention and maybe it has a "raw" presence which somehow complements a poem whose protagonist is a young woman "raw from college".

**2- The painting you contributed is very theatrical in atmosphere- the masked face- the clambering colours. Were you directly responding to the text or were you responding to the editor's general direction ( of contributing a piece of work that in a 1000 years can be read as representing this time) or were you responding to other concerns.**

The poem was the essential element. It is a marvellous poem. Since the age of ten, when I read my older sister's secondary schoolbook "the Intermediate Book of English Poetry", I have been a closet poet. Indeed, I have periods of being immersed in poetry. While some observers, including the poet herself, pay considerable attention to the philosophical, feminist and "nationalist" elements in Eavan Boland's poem, I regard her voice in "The Achill Woman" as somewhere between Osip Mandelstam and Sylvia Plath. It simply hits the spot. The poem is structured on beautiful rhythms and has a mystical presence and an existential edge. I suspect that real artists, like Eavan Boland, are misplaced mystics whose work 'comes across directly on the nervous system' as in the third verse of the Achill Woman which has a compelling power over the human imagination:

*“The zinc-music of the handle on the rim*

*tuned the evening. An Easter moon rose.*

*In the next-door field a stream was*

*a fluid sunset; and then, stars.”*

# Appendix – Item 3

## The Great Book Of Ireland Table of Contents

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| Jordan | Eithne | Artist | 7 | |
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| Shawcross | Neil | Artist | 95 | |
| Folan | Andrew | Artist | 96 | |
| Ryan | Richard | Poet | 96 | |
| Kennedy | Anne | Poet | 97 | |
| Collis | Peter | Artist | 97 | |
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| O'Connell | Deirdre | Artist | 99 | |
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| Hutcheson | Mark | Poet | 119 | |
| Teskey | Donald | Artist | 119 | |
| Boydell | Brian | Composer | 120 | |
| Barry | Gerald | Composer | 120 | |
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| Hanna | Jack | Poet | 123 | |
| Sweeney | Matthew | Poet | 123 | |
| Tartler | Grete | Poet | 123 | |
| O'Malley | Jane | Artist | 123 | |
| Bewick | Pauline | Artist | 124 | |
| Brett | Heather | Poet | 124 | |
| Fingleton | Seán | Artist | 125 | |

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# Appendix – Item 4

## List of Women Poets in The Great Book Of Ireland

| Surname | First | Occupation | Published by Salmon |
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| | | | |
| Meehan | Paula | Poet | |
| Dorcey | Mary | Poet | Salmon |
| Ni Chuilleanain | Eilean | Poet | |
| Akmadulina | Bella | Poet | |
| Ni Dhomhnaill | Nuala | Poet | |
| O'Callaghan | Julie | Poet | |
| Strong | Eithne | Poet | Salmon |
| O'Donnell | Mary | Poet | Salmon |
| Mhac an tSaoi | Mhaire | Poet | |
| Boland | Eavan | Poet | |
| Jenkinson | Biddy | Poet | |
| Cannon | Moya | Poet | Salmon |
| Hartigan | Anne | Poet | Salmon |
| O'Malley | Mary | Poet | Salmon |
| Brennan | Deirdre | Poet | |
| Slade | Jo | Poet | Salmon |
| Berkeley | Sara | Poet | |
| O'Connor | Clairr | Poet | |
| McBreen | Joan | Poet | Salmon |
| Higgins | Rita Ann | Poet | Salmon |
| Ní Dhomhnaill | Nuala | Poet | |
| Kennedy | Anne | Poet | Salmon |
| Cannon | Moya | Poet | |
| Forche | Carolyn | Poet | |
| Bourke | Eva | Poet | Salmon |
| Lendennie | Jessie | Poet | Salmon |
| McGuckian | Medbh | Poet | |
| Brett | Heather | Poet | Salmon |
| Bardwell | Leland | Poet | Salmon |
| Ní Ghlinn | Áine | Poet | |
| Foley | Marie | Poet | |